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Systems, Contexts, Relations: An Alternative Genealogy of Conceptual Art

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has revisited conceptual art in light of its ongoing influence on contemporary art, arguing against earlier accounts of the practice which gave a restricted account of its scope and stressed its historical foreclosure. Yet conceptual art remains both historically and theoretically underspecified, its multiple and often conflicting genealogies have not all been convincingly traced. This thesis argues for the importance of a *systems genealogy of conceptual art*—culminating in a distinctive mode of systematic conceptual art—as a primary determinant of the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art. It claims that from the perspective of post-postmodern, relational and context art, the contemporary significance of conceptual art can best be understood in light of its “systematic” mode. The distinctiveness of contemporary art, and the problems associated with its uncertain critical character, have to be understood in relation to the *unresolved* problems raised by conceptual art and the implications that these have held for art’s post-conceptual trajectory. Consequently, the thesis reconsiders the nascence, emergence, consolidation and putative historical supersession of conceptual art from the perspective of the present. The significance of the historical problem of postformalism is re-emphasised and the nascence of conceptual art located in relation to it. A neglected historical category of systems art is recovered and its significance for the emergence of conceptual art demonstrated. The consolidation of conceptual art is reconsidered by distinguishing its multiple modes. Here, a “systematic” mode of conceptual art is argued to be of greater current critical importance than the more established “analytic” mode. Finally, the supersession of conceptual art is revisited from the perspective of the present in order to demonstrate that contemporary context and relational practices recover problems first articulated by systematic conceptual art. It is from systematic conceptual art that relational and context art inherit their focus on the social relations and the social context of art. By recovering the systems genealogy and systematic mode of conceptual art we provide a richer conceptual genealogy of contemporary art.

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Introduction

We should always be in a position to envisage a new context entirely. We have to keep our options open, to pose questions to which the answers are not predictable, to which answers might come in a different language, suggesting a different grammar – a different system, a changed consciousness.

— Harald Szeeman, “When Attitudes Become Form” (1969)

Q: “Who is the best conceptual artist?” A: “The one with the most children.”

Lawrence Weiner’s joke elicits an awkward, almost reluctant, laugh. Our response is not ultimately attributable to the impropriety of its punch line, although this is evidently a contributing factor (the sexual pun undermines the intellectual gravitas that is conventionally held to characterise the “best” conceptual art). Such bathos is, however, only enough to raise a smile. The awkward, almost reluctant laugh is drawn forth by the punch line’s cognitive follow-through: the joke turns back on itself, undermining the assumption encoded in its question (an assumption with which the structure of the joke renders us unwillingly complicit). Here then we are made to laugh at ourselves, to acknowledge our own implication within those structures of art historical legitimation that seek to produce an answer to a question that goes against the spirit of conceptual art. As Victor Burgin has had cause to observe “Recollected in tranquillity conceptual art is now being woven into the seamless tapestry of ‘art history.’ This assimilation, however, is being achieved only at the cost of amnesia in respect of all that was most radical in conceptual art.”¹ We laugh reluctantly then, because the joke is on us.

Weiner’s joke challenges the habitual mechanisms and procedures of art history as they have been applied to an artistic practice that sought to undermine many of its foundational tenets, namely the coherence of artistic “movements,” the “genius” of particular artists and their concomitant “influence” on other, lesser or subsequent, ones. Since art history after conceptual art has taken many of these lessons to heart there is something of the straw man about such an encapsulation of the discipline. Nevertheless, it is incontestable that mainstream art history has, as Burgin charges, dealt with the challenge of conceptual art by turning it into something like a period style. This strategy overlooks the fundamental challenge to the ontology of art, and

thus to the discursive procedures of art history, that was posed by conceptual art. The challenge is thus to find ways of writing about and exhibiting conceptual art that are more faithful to conceptual art's challenge, procedures that hold to its radicality.

My own work on this thesis began from within this problematic and was stimulated by it. On 19th September 2005, at the Graduate Symposium of the Tate Modern's "Open Systems" conference, I presented a paper based on an early version of my Master's thesis entitled "All Systems Go: Recovering Jack Burnham's Systems Aesthetics". The conference was organised in conjunction with the Tate Modern's "Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970" (2005) exhibition, curated by Donna DeSalvo. "Open Systems" was one of a series of large, retrospective survey exhibitions on conceptual art that had been produced by major Western art institutions over the previous decade. Other such exhibitions had included: "Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975" (1995) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, curated by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer; "Circa '68" (1999) at Museu de Serralves, Porto, curated by Vicente Todolí and João Fernandes, (1999); and "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s" (1999) at Queens Museum of Art, New York, curated by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss.

The scope and scale of these exhibitions, and their associated catalogues and conferences, contributed to a major reassessment of conceptual art that is still ongoing today. Inevitably then all of these exhibitions intervened in the historicisation of conceptual art. As such they were obliged to negotiate the double-edged risk of either simply representing received knowledge about the practice (offering nothing new to the established discourse) or of engaging in revisionist historiography (producing an unproductive intervention in the established discourse). Given that conceptual artists are notorious for having offered rigorous theoretical expositions of their own practices,

engaging in deep and sustained polemics over the scope and adequacy of the very term “conceptual art,” this danger was all the more keenly evident.

Read within this historical conjuncture Weiner’s joke makes a final intervention, producing a critically salutary sting in the tail. It suggests a way to move beyond simply weaving conceptual art into the seamless tapestry of art history and instead offers a way to focus on what was, and remains, radical within the practice. Reconsidering the punch line after the uncomfortable laughter dies in the air we sense that it actually evinces a serious methodological strategy. Weiner’s joke suggests that we might approach the significance of conceptual art not primarily in terms of the self-conception of its prime movers, nor principally in light of its historic achievements, but rather in terms of its *ongoing* influence, its genealogical inflection of contemporary art. Furthermore, Weiner intimates, from this perspective we may develop a different understanding of which conceptual artists were most productive.

It is at this point that we must also insist on the limits of Weiner’s joke (or perhaps the sting in the sting of its tail) since we cannot conceive genealogy on the model of direct filiation (“the one with the most children”) without falling back in to the trap of “influence” about which the joke has rightly made us anxious. Genealogy must be thought on the Nietzschean model then, not as the pursuit of a fixed origin determining the meaning of the present but rather as an intervention questioning the stability of the past from the perspective of the present.² Here then we will reject any account focused on tracing successive “generations” of conceptual artists. Instead we will approach conceptual art from the perspective of contemporary, post-conceptual art, that is to say from the viewpoint of its illegitimate and unruly, but thereby paradoxically dutiful, offspring. Despite the range, depth and quality of the scholarship already undertaken on conceptual art, work remains to be done that applies such a principle.

In order to understand the complex genealogical lines of contemporary post-conceptual art it is necessary to revisit the historiography of the 1960s in order to challenge the existing, “settled” accounts of conceptual art in its intellectual and socio-political context. This means doing exactly the opposite of monumentalising the sixties as a moment of lost promise, to be melancholically revisited and mourned. James Meyer has commented on “the legions of ‘younger’ art historians who compulsively ransack the archives of sixties practitioners and critics for fresh materials and insights,” observing that “much of the art writing on the period, my own included, bespeaks the melancholy of having not been present at the happenings and the exhibitions and the demonstrations we so assiduously describe.”³ Instead, we must understand the archive to be constituted only by its ransacking. In so doing it is also necessary to be alert to the danger of presenting rejectamenta as radical new discoveries.

The analysis of conceptual art demands a critical art history. As I deploy the term I take it to have two principle implications: (i) Critical art history opposes itself to historicism and interrogates and judges the past from the perspective of the present; (ii) Critical art history aims to consider particular works of art within a broader, historically unfolding and philosophically self-reflexive conception of art.⁴ Conceptual art demands such an approach precisely because it explicitly sought to explore and challenge the ontology of art as understood by “normal” art history.⁵ Conceptual art demanded that the formalistic categories of art history such as “movement” and “style” be abandoned as inadequate. Actually doing so requires a critical art history, one prepared to revisit its foundational assumptions. As the conceptual artist and, latterly, academic, Terry Smith summarises the problem: “Art historians tend to mistrust philosophical critiques of their procedures... Like criticism, history is something you do according to models, rules of thumb, the prejudices of your peers –

its understructure, your theory of art and your theory of history, your ideology, your ontology and your psychic needs, habitually remain implicit, repressed even.”⁶

Nevertheless, while conceptual art mounted a salient challenge to the methodology of the discipline that would seek to historicise it (a challenge which still holds and which has inspired this thesis), a critical art history cannot simply defer to artists’ self-understanding of the implications of their practice. Conceptual art’s self-understanding was that it repudiated formalist modernism but it frequently overlooked its own historical location, such that it forgot that its own procedures were themselves influenced and implicated in the development of modernity. A critical art history necessarily looks as critically at art as it does at history.

These then are the principles in accordance with which I have approached constructing an alternative genealogy of conceptual art. The alterity of the genealogy presented here lies in differing both from received art historical accounts of conceptual art as well as from the frequently self-legitimizing alternatives advocated by conceptual art’s practitioners. The still-dominant account of the mature form of conceptual art as “linguistic” or “analytic” can be counterposed to an alternative, and revealing, narrative concerning conceptual art’s relation to a postformalist “systems” art. A primary claim of this thesis is that we can identify a marginalised historical category of “systems” art, arguing that it represented an early articulation of the artistic response to a set of distinctive artistic problems what would subsequently come to be identified as “conceptual” art. Rather than following Benjamin Buchloh’s entrenched, if no longer hegemonic, account of conceptual art’s origins in an “aesthetic of administration” and telos in a “critique of institutions”, I trace an alternative genealogy (one picked up by a contemporary generation of relational and context artists) that sees conceptual art as imbricated with postformalist “systems” art such that we can identify a systematic mode of conceptual art. This alternative account

prioritises conceptual art's relation to "technological rationality" (as borrowed from Herbert Marcuse by the critic Jack Burnham) instead of focusing on its relation to "administration" (as borrowed from Max Weber by Buchloh).

Systematic conceptual art rejected Greenbergian formalism as a suitable account of the ontology of autonomous art. It turned instead to Systems, Information, Cybernetic and, somewhat inconsistently, Critical Theory, in an assault on an aesthetic art historically rendered heteronomous. Nevertheless, in so doing, it also risked complicity with the most advanced intellectual technologies of social control and thus laid itself open to a heteronomy of its own devising. Unpicking the implications of this knot and determining its significance for contemporary art constitutes the work undertaken by this thesis.

Systematic conceptual art, in its most developed articulation, self-reflexively mediated between the art system and the social system; it related social and artistic technique. This alternative "systems" genealogy of conceptual art more clearly demonstrates a fertile critical legacy. Consequently, systematic conceptual art should be understood as at least as significant as "analytic" conceptual art in the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art. By reformulating the established historical and theoretical narrative concerning the origins and development of conceptual art, our understanding of the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art is enriched. In so doing the "canon" of conceptual artists is also re-ordered, according greater significance to artists not within Seth Siegelaub's "stable" nor associated with Art & Language (in either UK or US incarnation): Adrian Piper, Victor Burgin, Mel Bochner, Hans Haacke, Mierle Lademan Ukeles and Mary Kelly.

I conclude here with a brief discussion of two notable features of the text that might both raise questions for the reader concerning the methodology of the thesis:

First, my selection of artists remains “canonical” in that it treats only those artists whose careers have been played out within the discursive and institutional context of Anglo-American conceptual art. This decision was strategic. It serves of course to limit the scope of the study. However this limitation was conceived as an intervention. Much of the scholarly work that has recently been undertaken on conceptual art renders the category more complex by way of what we might call *geographic* differentiation, that is it demonstrates that conceptual art developed differently in different metropolitan centres. However I have sought to make a *conceptual* differentiation within “canonical” Anglo-American conceptual art, thereby destabilising the security of the category.

Second, artistic “movements”—such as minimalism, tech art, pop art—have been set in lowercase throughout. This is in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style (which this thesis adheres to) but it also constitutes a point of principle. Here I aim to challenge the adequacy of designating artistic “movements” conceived on the model of a proper name. Instead I seek to focus on the shifting problem complexes addressed by art as it seeks to produce its autonomy out of changing historical circumstances.

¹ Victor Burgin, “The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms,” in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 29.

² Foucault’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept of genealogy remains the most suggestive and one on which I draw, see Michael Foucault “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), 76–100.

³ James Meyer, “The Return of the Sixties in Contemporary Art and Criticism,” in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 324–332, 329; 330.

⁴ On this issue, see Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁵ I use “normal” here in an analogous sense to Thomas Kuhn’s description of “normal” science, see Thomas Kuhn, “The Nature of Normal Science” in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23–34. Kuhn’s text, first published in 1962, was read and cited as an influence by many conceptual artists.

⁶ Terry Smith, “Doing Art History,” *The Fox* 2 (1975): 97–104, 97–98.

1. Contemporary Art's Conceptual Genealogy

Art's Ongoing Uncertainty

1970. *The Sperone Gallery. Turin*. Inside the gallery no paintings or sculptures can be seen. Instead, a short citation has been handwritten on one of the gallery's walls in pencil. The citation reads "Some places to which we can come and for a while 'be free to think about what we are going to do.'" Entitled *Marcuse Piece* (1970), the work was produced by the American conceptual artist Robert Barry. The quotation it cites is excerpted from the final lines of Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* (1969).¹ Barry has subsequently reproduced the work in different contexts and describes *Marcuse Piece* as a "work-in-progress."² Such a claim argues for the continuing relevance of this work today.³ Indeed, *Marcuse Piece* prompts questions about the "relationality" and "context specificity" of art, issues that have been explicitly thematised in contemporary context and relational art practices. Here then conceptual art remains contemporary. Yet Jeff Wall has insisted on the "collapse" of conceptual art and asserted, "Some artists, like... Barry, easily shed the trappings of the struggle for historical memory and moved toward orthodox commodity production, albeit of a refined and mildly ironic type."⁴ On Wall's account, conceptual art has grown old and died. *How then, from the perspective of contemporary art, should we understand the character and critical legacy of conceptual art?*

This question can be opened up by way of a deeper consideration of *Marcuse Piece*. Though Marcuse noted that *An Essay on Liberation* was "written before the events of May and June 1968 in France" he also recognised the striking "coincidence between some of the ideas suggested in my essay, and those

formulated by the young militants...”⁵ Though cautiously framed in relation to “the present chance of these forces,” and insistent that “the radical utopian character of their demands far surpasses the hypotheses of my essay,” Marcuse’s text nevertheless decisively broke with the Marxian prohibition on utopian speculation and sought to outline, albeit tentatively, recipes for a liberated future.⁶ Here, in a Schillerian vein, Marcuse proposed that a free society would be characterised by the pervasiveness of aesthetic form: “the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the *Form* of the society itself.”⁷

This preparedness to undertake utopian speculation distanced Marcuse from the official project of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and aligned him, for a time, with the cultural activism of the late 1960s. As Marcuse announced: “The new sensibility” had become “a political factor” which consequently required critical theory to “incorporate the new dimension into its concepts” in order to “project its implications for the possible construction of a free society.”⁸ “Marcuse” then, for Barry and many others of his generation, was a metonym for the political project of the New Left.⁹ Moreover, conceptual art, as Jeff Wall has argued persuasively, drew “its themes, strategies and content from the politicized cultural critique identified broadly with the New Left.”¹⁰ Similarly, for Daniel Buren, conceptual art took “the art world itself as a political problem” in order to question whether “that micro-system [was] a total revelation or reverberation of the general system?”¹¹ More directly still, in Mary Kelly’s apposite summary, conceptual art set about “interrogating the conditions of the existence of the object and then going on to the second stage

and interrogating the conditions of the interrogation itself.”¹² Given such claims, made by its practitioners, it follows that any substantive account of conceptual art and its critical legacy should acknowledge its relation to the political context addressed by the New Left.¹³ In other words, conceptual art's ontological claims (challenging the definition of art) should not be considered dissociable from its political claims (defining the challenge of art).

In *An Essay on Liberation* Marcuse considered, with little enthusiasm, the revolutionary potential of new forms of class composition attendant upon developments in advanced capitalist society, a process characterised by the “dematerialization of labour” and the emergence of a “new working class.”¹⁴ Marcuse also, and with more enthusiasm, weighed the possibilities for an “instinctual” transformation freeing individuals from a “second nature” that had been inculcated by capitalism and which tied subjects libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form.

For Marcuse, working within a philosophical tradition that sought to articulate the relation between artistic and individual and social autonomy, the aesthetic dimension could “serve as a sort of gauge for a free society.”¹⁵ Marcuse, however, was nevertheless obliged to record the fact that art's traditionally “aesthetic” character had been sacrificed by the historical avant-garde's from which the new art of the 1960s derived much of their inspiration. The “free society” was thus prefigured *anti*-aesthetically: “The future ingresses into the present: in its negativity, the desublimating art and anti-art of today “anticipate” a stage where society's capacity to produce may be akin to the

creative capacity of art, and the construction of the world of art akin to the reconstruction of the real world — union of liberating art and liberating technology.”¹⁶ Such a situation left the character of contemporary art, as art, uncertain and, as a result, Marcuse would only approach defining art negatively: “The emergence of contemporary art... means more than the traditional replacement of one style by another... The new object of art is not yet “given,” but the familiar object has become impossible, false.”¹⁷

The status of “contemporary” art has remained uncertain ever since the crisis of modernism that Marcuse described in *An Essay on Liberation*. Yet it was Adorno, rather than Marcuse, who offered the most compelling formulation of this problem.¹⁸ In Adorno’s infamous introductory sentence to *Aesthetic Theory*: “It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident any more, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist...”¹⁹ This ongoing crisis of contemporary art is characterised by the collapse of medium-specific conventions, the exhaustion of clear disciplinary distinctions, the apparent failure of the avant-garde strategy of negation as well as by the suspicion of the new condition of art-in-general that has been ushered in as a result: “The forfeiture of what could be done spontaneously or unproblematically has not been compensated for by the open infinitude of new possibilities that reflection confronts.”²⁰

But has the character of art’s uncertainty remained stable? Questions about art after modernism (and the attendant arguments over the adequacy of postmodernism as a critical category) have regulated debates ever since.

Conceptual art plays a pivotal role within them. Here, Barry's *Marcuse Piece* stages a double injunction by insisting that we "think about what we are going to do:" it implicitly acknowledges the *artistic* and the *political* challenges facing "contemporary" art. Barry alludes to the politics of anti-aesthetics.

Numerous attempts have been made, both progressive and reactionary, to produce some certainty in the face of the radical doubt about the actuality of contemporary art. To summarise some of the more influential: Michael Fried's rejection of minimalist "theatricality" in favour of a renewal of medium-specific "conviction;" Rosalind Krauss' speculations on the "expanded field" and "post-medium condition;" Arthur Danto's eschatological "end of art" and purgatorial "art after the end of art" theses; Thierry de Duve's deduction of a "generic art;" Hal Foster's fragile attempts to produce a "critical postmodernism."²¹

A common problem marks all of these accounts. These theorists have worked either to accommodate (Fried, early and late-period Krauss) or to overturn (middle-period Krauss, Danto, de Duve, Foster) a restricted concept of modernism inherited from Clement Greenberg. In the American context then, the crisis of artistic modernism has been run together with the crisis of Greenbergian formalist modernism. Given the influence of American art and American criticism since the 1960s, the deleterious character of such a "Greenberg effect" has been propagated globally.²² This has been to the detriment of other accounts of modernism, even those that are demonstrably more critically substantial, such as those elaborated by members of the Frankfurt School (principally Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse).²³

Consequently, artistic modernism remains paradoxically both over- and underdetermined as Greenbergian formalist modernism.²⁴ In the absence of the widespread reception of any more articulated theoretical model then, Greenberg's narrow conception of modernism and the artistic and critical reaction it provoked continues to inflect prominent accounts of contemporary art's uncertainty. Even when Greenberg is disavowed he is affirmed. The space of his abstract negation is at the same time that of his confirmation. An entire generation of artists and theorists, beginning with the quarrel between Judd and Fried, have been defined by the Greenberg effect.

Yet Barry's citation of Marcuse suggests the presence, however faint, of an alternative modernist tradition at play in the 1960s and early 1970s, one engaged by conceptual art and oriented around the conceptual apparatus provided by Frankfurt School Critical Theory. This alternative modernist tradition was mediated, albeit incompletely, in the American context by the theorist Jack Burnham's Marcuse-inspired writings on postformalist and conceptual art, specifically his elaboration of what he termed a "systems aesthetics." This alternative modernist tradition was characterised by the attempt to think social and artistic developments in tandem, accounting for advanced art in relation to the development of an advanced industrial society. In this tradition the central problem was the question of art's autonomy: a problem that raised issues including art's critical character (or lack of it); art's relation to reification; and the tension between aesthetic and instrumental/technocratic reason. All were artistic and philosophic problems

which were addressed by conceptual art and which continue to resonate in the present.

This alternative modernist tradition has remained marginal to mainstream debates. Lacking a more substantive account of modernism has left postmodernist art and theory on unstable ground. Hal Foster has proclaimed the “critical” postmodernism that he was instrumental in defining to be over. For Foster, we now inhabit a cultural condition of “aftermath” characterised by a peculiar lack of productivity and stagnation: “the recursive strategy of the ‘neo’ appears as attenuated today as the oppositional logic of the ‘post’ is tired: neither suffices as a strong paradigm for artistic or critical practice, and no other model stands in their stead.”²⁵ The current theoretical exhaustion, even collapse, of postmodernism leaves art as uncertain as ever, forty years down the line. However, Foster’s position rhetorically stages an exhaustion of its own—new critical models must be made rather than awaited.²⁶ In order to do so it is necessary to reconsider the character of contemporary art today in light of its complex conceptual genealogy, a genealogy decisively inflected by an alternative, non-Greenbergian, modernist tradition.

Characterising Contemporary Art

It is notoriously difficult to specify the contemporaneity of contemporary art.²⁷ Given the aging of both modernism and postmodernism as critical categories, and the absence of any plausible replacement for them, the “contemporary” has become a default cultural periodisation for the artistically current. Yet the contemporary is also a present absolute. As a cultural periodisation then it is continually subject to slippage and displacement, to aging. And the “contemporary” necessarily ages far more rapidly than the “modern.” Nevertheless, notwithstanding these reservations about its suitability as such, *faute de mieux*, “contemporary” art is taken on here as a cultural periodisation, the generic name for the post-postmodern art that first emerged in the 1990s and which still lacks an adequate theorisation.

This is not, however, to suggest that no one has attempted to theorise the artistic present. Johanna Drucker and Nicolas Bourriaud have both sought to elaborate new, post-postmodern, aesthetic paradigms for contemporary art: “complicit aesthetics” (Drucker) and “relational aesthetics” (Bourriaud). The deep problems associated with both these accounts of contemporary art—emblematised by the fundamentally ambiguous status of the “aesthetic” within both of them—help to clarify the problems associated with specifying the contemporaneity of contemporary art.

For Drucker, modernist autonomy was negated by postmodern contingency, which in turn has been negated by the “complicity” of contemporary art:

Modernist autonomy serves as the background and contrast with what came to be identified as postmodernism's insistence on contingency. But neither of these provides the critical frame for understanding the condition of replete, even contradictory, *complicity* that characterises art at the millennium. Complicit aesthetics acknowledge the beneficial relation of artist and fine art in the system in which they function.²⁸

Yet Drucker does not provide a convincing account of why the objects that she designates (anachronistically) “fine art” might not just as well be considered luxury goods. Against the grain of her own earlier work on modernism and autonomy, Drucker insists on valorising the proliferation of contemporary cultural production as art without providing compelling criteria demonstrating why one should do so.²⁹ It is hard to see why an “art” complicit with its own commodification through and through (rather than recognising the unavoidability of the requirement to wrest its autonomy from its heteronomy) should lay claim to the name. In an attempt to justify her position Drucker falls back on the rhetoric of aestheticism once used to distinguish the “fine” from the “applied” arts: “Fine art gives form to expressive, imaginative gestures, demonstrating that value can be created in symbolic discourse.”³⁰ However, “expressive, imaginative gestures” and “value... created in symbolic discourse” do not qualify an object as art when these characteristics have long been as much a part of the commodity aesthetics of any successful new product.³¹

Brief allusions to formalist aesthetics is the closest Drucker comes to a substantive claim on the name of art: “the critical rerecognition of the aesthetic value of material experience as a point of departure for the discussion of works of contemporary art, is what allows the concept of affirmative ‘complicity’ to absorb and extend the idea of ‘contingency’ that prevailed in postmodern

writing in the 1980s and early 1990s.”³² Yet in this misguided deduction, Drucker mistakes the contemporary, post-conceptual recognition of what Peter Osborne has termed the “ineliminability (but radical insufficiency)” of the aesthetic dimension of the artwork for what she calls “the critical rerecognition of the aesthetic value of material experience.”³³

Overall, there is too much heteronomy in Drucker’s account of contemporary art. Despite having written on the critical tradition, Drucker nevertheless produces an argument that is not only hostile towards but also essentially illegible within it. John Roberts notes of this tradition that “autonomy is the name given to the process of formal and cognitive self-criticism which art must undergo in order to constitute the conditions of its very possibility and emergence.”³⁴ Here then the attempt to negate the negation that was postmodernism produces a mistaken affirmation. Drucker produces an account of heteronomous art and valorises it as if it were autonomous while all the time denying the validity of artistic autonomy.

Here it is worth recalling Jeff Wall’s definition of a “postautonomous” art in order to distinguish it from Drucker’s. For Wall, the crucial point about postautonomous art is that it remains, against appearances, *autonomous*. It produces its autonomy out of its postautonomy:

Autonomous art had reached a state where it appeared that it could only validly be made by means of the strictest imitation of the nonautonomous. This heteronomy might take the form of direct critical commentary, as with Art & Language; with the production of political propaganda, so common in the 1970s; or with the many varieties of “intervention” or appropriation practiced more recently. *But in all these procedures, an autonomous work of art is still necessarily created.* The innovation is that the content of the work is the validity of the model or hypothesis of nonautonomy it creates.³⁵

Wall's account of postautonomous art (excepting his egregious inclusion of Art & Language within the tendency) is broadly coterminous with Foster's critical postmodernism: "intervention" and "appropriation" are two of the most prominent critical categories developed by the art of the 1980s. In seeking to characterise a post-postmodern art Drucker suggests that art can simply take the next "logical" step and negate postautonomous art. This however is a negation too far since so-called complicit art transcends (autonomous) postautonomous art only by becoming a commodity through and through. Drucker, paradoxically employing an avant-garde logic of negation, produces nothing less than a false sublation of art and an affirmation of the culture industry. She even states as much: "art *is* a culture industry, rather than being opposed to it."³⁶

Where Drucker's work is pertinent is that, by attempting to valorise the proliferation of "complicit" art, she draws attention to the complete collapse of the autonomy of the traditional production and reception contexts of art (the bourgeois institutions of studio and museum) and recognises the development of an art industry out of what had been, at least residually, a sphere of production outside that of planned production. Yet this collapse in the autonomy of the institutions of art does not mean that individual artworks cannot produce their own autonomy, just that it is more difficult to do so. Here Chantal Mouffe's intervention is apposite. She accurately summarises the substantive problem for contemporary art: "Can artistic practices still play a critical role in advanced industrial societies where artists and cultural workers

have become a necessary part of capitalist production?”³⁷ Mouffe specifies a means by which we might assess the status of the contemporary artwork (playing a “critical role”) and delimits the contemporary social conditions against which this evaluation must be made (the thoroughgoing integration of art into “capitalist production”). Mouffe thus summarises the artistic and social conditions that any contemporary art—and hence art theory—will be obliged to negotiate.³⁸

Mouffe’s remark was made in the course of a discussion of Carsten Höller’s work and Höller himself has commented on the problem of autonomy and postautonomy in relation to contemporary art: “If one assumes that art is autonomous, one may try to build a bridge between two spheres: art and fashion, art and science. That kind of dualism and its supposed dialectical outcome, in a chic “autonomy-is-over” attitude, is not valid. I prefer the “and...and...and” model to the banality of duality.”³⁹ Here, we sense Höller rhetorically taking his generational distance from a certain form of “chic” postmodern art for which autonomy-was-over precisely because it was understood so superficially. Höller also demonstrates his distance from Wall’s account of the paradoxical autonomy of postautonomous art. However, it is not clear from his account what Höller’s own, updated, conception of autonomy might be. Are these concatenated social systems (‘art’ and ‘fashion’ and ‘science’) all held to be autonomous but somehow immanently relatable? We hear echoes of Deleuze and Guattari in this conjunction of conjunctions. Perhaps, though, we should not look to the artist’s public statements to supply us with firm answers, especially given Höller’s irony. The artist’s accounts of his

work are deliberately contradictory, wilfully inadequate. They are designed to evoke exactly the feelings of doubt and perplexity that are thematised throughout his practice. Furthermore, even were Höller not so evasive, the theory of artistic intentionality should be challenged. Artists are not necessarily the surest guides to the significance of their work and Höller's emphasis on doubt acknowledges this. Here then we are obliged to look beyond Höller's own account of his practice in order to understand the artistic problems he addresses.

Two broad contemporary art "movements," originating in the 1990s, formed the backdrop against which Höller's work emerged. Descended from the investigations of conceptual artists in the 1960s and 1970s, most identifiably via their negotiated relation to institutional critique, these practices have been resolved under the proper names of "context art" and "relational art." In *Relational Aesthetics* the curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud has defined them both as follows: "Context [art]: *In situ* art is a form of artistic activity that encompasses the space in which it is on view;" "Relational (art): A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."⁴⁰ Yet the fact that Höller has been read as belonging to both relational and contextual "movements" should indicate that these categories are not mutually exclusive, or not at least as they have been theorised so far.⁴¹ Bourriaud suggests as much, insisting that they are "mainly one and the same thing."⁴² However, Liam Gillick, amongst others, has insisted

on the tension between “context” and “relational” art, disputing the accuracy of Bourriaud’s claim:

In Cologne during the 1990s—well before the publication of *Relational Aesthetics*—a tension could be perceived between those artists who advocated transparency within art (Andrea Fraser, Clegg and Guttman, and others associated with Galerie Christian Nagel) and those who believed that a sequence of veils and meanderings might be necessary to combat the chaotic ebb and flow of capitalism (Phillipe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, and others associated with the Galerie Esther Schipper).⁴³

For Gillick the tension was exemplified in the competing rosters of two Cologne galleries, rosters which were distinguished by their artists’ opposed responses to the problem of artistic critique. Gillick’s account thus gives a social basis for the division between context and relational artists in relation to their representation by Galerie Christian Nagel (context art) and Galerie Esther Schipper (relational art). More significantly for our argument here (since gallery representation will be considered principally an epiphenomenon of an artist’s position rather than constitutive thereof), Gillick names the differences between the approaches of the two artistic groups: “transparency within art” for context art, “a sequence of veils and meanderings” for relational art. Reformulating the elliptical quality of Gillick’s claims: self-reflexive immanent critique for context art, oblique immanent critique for relational art. Remarking on the break between relational art and other artistic strategies Walead Beshty states that:

The conglomeration of strategies, and artists, that fit under the heading *Relational Aesthetics* indicate, if only for recent history’s lack of “movements,” a pronounced shift in the topography of contemporary art, and the need for a realignment of critical terminology. Despite its amorphous set of conditions and tenets, as they are expressed by Nicolas Bourriaud... it separates itself distinctly from early interventionist tactics (i.e. Institutional Critique, Identity Politics, Performance and Installation).⁴⁴

Rather than understand context and relational art as discrete “movements” then, they will be understood as related, but not congruent, strategies within the development of the problematic of artistic critique, specifically the problem of how to produce an autonomous contemporary, post-postmodern, art. In this endeavour context and relational artists necessarily looked back to a pre-postmodern (but ambiguously modern) conceptual art: Gillick has described “the peculiar way the early 90s mirrored the early 70s.”⁴⁵

In order to understand contemporary art it is necessary to articulate a nuanced account of conceptual art in its social, political and intellectual context. Despite the range, depth and quality of first and second generations of scholarship on conceptual art, work still remains to be done in this area. By looking again at the emergence, consolidation and dissolution of conceptual art we discover new lines in the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art. We begin to develop a critical history that can account for, and assess, the relation between the conceptual art of the late 60s and the contemporary, post-conceptual relational and context art of the 90s and beyond.

Modernism and Conceptual Art

The protracted moment of uncertainty regarding art's status coincides precisely with the advent and development of conceptual art. Conceptual art and the crisis of modernism are coincident phenomena. Furthermore, conceptual art can be understood as precisely the pre-eminent artistic response to the crisis of modernist art. As Charles Harrison suggests, 'the representative critical character of conceptual art was established by reference to the epistemological conditions and implications of Modernist theory... to the ontological character of Modernist production, and to the moral and ideological character of Modernist culture...' ⁴⁶ Memorably, Mel Ramsden has described conceptual art as "Modernism's nervous breakdown."⁴⁷ Yet with equal legitimacy we might also claim that the uncertain status of contemporary (as opposed to modernist) art is conceptual art's legacy, i.e. that what was latent in the crisis of modernist art was precisely conceptual art and that it is conceptual art which then goes on to set the terms of the crisis. Victor Burgin has elaborated on the ambivalence of this situation: "It seems likely that 'conceptualism' is destined... to be represented as that 'movement' which, by undermining 'modernism,' paved the way for 'post-modernism.' None of the 'isms' here, however, were, or are, unitary phenomena nor do such cultural phenomena simply give way to one another like television programmes in an evening's viewing."⁴⁸

Perhaps though it is not appropriate to think of conceptual art as an 'ism' at all. Rather, it should be understood as a set of interrelated practices that establish

the conditions for the production of (autonomous) art after the crisis of modernism. This is the substance of Michael Newman's position:

The legacy of Conceptual art is not a solution, nor is it a 'style' to be imitated, but it is rather a problematic: the laying bare on the one hand of the conditions which *all* art has to face whether Conceptual or not... and, on the other hand, the *specific* conditions of its historical moment and socio-political milieu... Perhaps in this dual exigency Conceptual art renders explicit the aporia of modern art.⁴⁹

How then should we think the relation of modernism and postmodernism as mediated by conceptual art practice? In Foster's condition of "aftermath," this surely structures the "aporia" that Newman draws attention to. From our perspective, does modernism even "give way" to postmodernism at all? Höller's work, for example, does not seem to fit within any familiar schema of artistic postmodernism.

Neither Greenberg nor Adorno, as the pre-eminent theorists of high modernism offer us any real insight on conceptual art. Predictably, given his refusal of minimalism, Greenberg was unable to register the critical force and decisive reorientation of the ontology of modern art that conceptual art represented. He dismissed conceptual art and its anti-aesthetic challenge with a couple of throwaway lines in the late criticism. Adorno, in contrast, did not reflect on conceptual art precisely because he died just as it was beginning to gain widespread visibility. Both Greenberg's medium-specific modernism and Adorno's more complex "dissonant" modernism are points of departure, marking the end of a certain moment of modernist art but of little direct use in treating the conceptual art that effected it.

However, working within a broadly Adornian framework, Peter Osborne has developed a theoretical position that does not rely on the modernism/postmodernism dyad. Instead, it elevates 'conceptual art' above the position of one movement amongst others, giving it a privileged ontological status and periodising claim. He asserts that it is through 'conceptual art' that the various and competing antimodernist strategies in the art of the 1960s should be conceived. For Osborne then, the modernism/postmodernism sequence should be replaced with: "An alternative periodization of art after modernism that privileges the sequence modernism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art over the modernist/postmodernist couplet, and treats the conceptual/post-conceptual trajectory as the standpoint from which to totalize the wide array of other anti-'modernist' movements – where 'modernism' is used here in its restrictive and ultimately mystifying, but nonetheless still critically 'actual,' Greenbergian sense."⁵⁰

Osborne goes on to observe, parenthetically, that: "(A philosophically adequate conception of modernism as a temporal logic of cultural forms would embrace the whole sequence; 'postmodernism' being the misrecognition of a particular stage in the dialectic of modernisms.)"⁵¹ On such terms, "modernism" would include conceptual art and post-conceptual art within its temporal logic, such that modernism is not in any simple sense superseded by conceptual art. Modernism is both a stage in the sequence (a specific period), and the sequence itself. Conceptual art, for Osborne, is succeeded by a set of post-conceptual practices derived out of its critical legacy (in a sense, from its failures):

By 'post-conceptual' art I understand an art premised on the complex historical experience and critical legacy of conceptual art. The critical legacy of conceptual art consists in the combination of four main insights, which collectively make up the condition of possibility of a post-conceptual art. These are: 1) the ineliminability but radical insufficiency of the aesthetic dimension of the art work; 2) the necessary conceptuality of the art work; 3) the critical requirement of the anti-aesthetic use of aesthetic materials; 4) the radically redistributive character of the unity of the artwork across the totality of its material instantiations (and the instability of the empirical borders of this totality).⁵²

According to Osborne then, conceptual art constitutes a finished project, but its various ends prove directly generative for a set of post-conceptual practices derived from it.

Following this model, the question of contemporary art's criticality should be resolved in relation to the distinctively post-conceptual character of contemporary art (this being the defining ontological condition of contemporary art's contemporaneity). Attempting to do so will require us to look again at the history of conceptual art. Höller's work, and the broader context from which it emerged, will cause us to think again about the critical effectivity of past works of conceptual art. The adequacy and specificity of existing critical accounts of 'conceptual art' are at stake here. For, just as artistic postmodernism eventually falters as a result of its restricted reading of modernism (as Greenbergian) so the adequacy of the 'post-conceptual' as a category depends on how conceptual art is construed. Might the "complex historical experience and critical legacy" of conceptual art have further insights to offer us, insights that a contemporary generation of artists has picked up on but which has not yet been adequately reflected in existing accounts of their work?

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In 1998 the artist Silvia Kolbowski sent letters to sixty artists inviting them to participate in a project on the history of conceptual art. Forty artists eventually agreed to her request to briefly describe a conceptual art work (not one of their own) which they personally witnessed or experienced between 1965 and 1975. Kolbowski deliberately gave a highly inclusive definition of conceptual art, including photography, film, video and performance. She also stipulated that neither the name of the artist, nor the title of the work described should be mentioned (though the place and date of installation might be). Subsequently, the artists who responded were filmed reciting their account, with only their hands in shot. The resulting responses were presented, also anonymised, in September 1999 at American Fine Arts Gallery in New York. The artists' hands were projected on various walls of the gallery and the artists' voices were broadcast, out of sync, on a sound system. Kolbowski's entitled this work *An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art*.⁵³

The piece is suggestive on many levels, exposing the plurality of practices that have been considered "conceptual," the instability of memory, as well as the ideological conflicts and personal tensions of a past era. At another level *An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art* has the quality of a highbrow parlour game, challenging the audience to test their knowledge of the period and to identify the artists speaking (the aggregate set of names of the participating artists was provided on a handout). Most pertinently to the discussion here, the work sets up a seemingly sceptical position with regard to historiography. By

foregrounding the inadequacy of the historical account, Kolbowski seems also to question historiography *tout court*. Yet at the same time her work is manifestly an example of oral history, albeit one in which no attempt has been made to corroborate or cross-check its sources or even to reconcile its many disparate voices into a coherent narrative. At a very straightforward level then the work is literally and self-consciously “inadequate” when considered from the perspective of even the most minimal set of historiographical conventions. *An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art* is profoundly ambivalent then, holding out the possibility that one might construct an adequate history at the same time as suggesting the impossibility of so doing.

Arguably however, when one considers the piece still further, this ambiguity recedes a little. In its place arises the impression that Kolbowski's work is in fact a profound reflection on the requirement that history be recognised as made from the perspective of the present. The voices narrate past events, events that occurred at different times and in different places. Yet the narratives combine in the present moment and must be made sense of as such. Kolbowski stipulates that she made the piece against the backdrop of the neo-conceptualism of the 1990s and that she was concerned to “trouble the fluidity of the official return.”⁵⁴ The piece alerts us to the dangers of believing that one can simply inherit a received account, independent of any individual's vested interests. Instead the work argues that conceptual art is necessarily received in the light of the problems of the present moment and must be construed and constructed as such. *An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art* refuses the possibility of any simplistic neo- relation of recovery, and rather insists that true fidelity to

the history of conceptual art involves the difficult work of reconstituting it in the present. Kolbowski's work does not ultimately propose that all historiography is inadequate, but rather holds open the question of what an adequate history of conceptual art might be.

Conceptual art (and post-conceptual art), following Osborne, is a "critical category that is constituted at the level of the historical ontology of the art work; it is not a traditional art-historical or art-critical concept at the level of either medium, form or style."⁵⁵ At this level then, the degree to which an individual artist chooses to associate him or herself with the conceptual art "movement" is not relevant. The continuity of a tradition is not what is in question here. Rather, the critical character of any artist's work will determine in what relation they stand to conceptual art and its post-conceptual legacy. As long as there are artists actualising the requisite ontological conditions of post-conceptual art there will also be a requirement for a working concept of conceptual art. Its adequacy will be determined precisely by the sufficiency of the account it provides for the art being made which actualises these post-conceptual conditions.

Working towards an adequate history of conceptual art will involve working backwards from the present rather than simply digging in the archive. Precisely the grounds of what is of interest in the historical record will be constituted from the perspective of the present. In this regard, the phenomenological immediacy of the oral testimony that Kolbowski collected from the first generation of conceptual artists could be misleading. This is perhaps the reason

that she chose to sunder the hands of the makers from their voices and, moreover, had the artists reflect on each others' work rather than their own. Kolbowski used these devices in order to make it clear that what was of significance in the past, what was actual even, can only be constructed discursively in the present (even for conceptual artists themselves).

Histories and Theories

The first generation of the historiography of conceptual art was for the most part conducted by its practitioners or those very closely associated with them. Here the most influential figures have been Lucy Lippard, Charles Harrison, Benjamin Buchloh and Jeff Wall (other artists and critics having made important but more local contributions): Wall started his career as a conceptual artist; Buchloh edited and published *Interfunktionen* (a magazine strongly associated with conceptual art); Charles Harrison, after an early career as an independent critic, joined Art & Language as their official historian (“I write both as a participant in the practice of Art & Language and as an advocate for its various productions”); and Lucy Lippard openly announced that she “identified with artists and never saw myself as their adversary.”⁵⁶ This situation was not coincidental but rather resulted directly from conceptual art’s challenge to the traditional structures of critical authority and validation. As Ursula Meyer noted in one of the first survey texts dedicated to characterising conceptual art: “Conceptual artists take over the role of the critic in terms of framing their own propositions, ideas and concepts.”⁵⁷ Yet from the perspective of accepted historiographical method, accounts provided by first hand sources (and *a fortiori* by interested observers) are considered at best partial and at worst biased. Such accounts risk taking on the character of memoirs or polemics. Lucy Lippard exemplifies this problem in an almost comic manner:

There has been a lot of bickering about what Conceptual art is/was; who began it; who did what when with it; what its goals, philosophy, and politics were and might have been. I was there, but I don’t trust my memory. I don’t trust anyone else’s either. And I trust even less the authoritative overviews by

those who were not there. So I'm going to quote myself a lot here, because I knew more about it then than I do now, despite the advantages of hindsight.⁵⁸

On the criteria that Lippard evinces here there would be no legitimate historiography other than that of participant observers and thus no historiography at all. Though the accounts of conceptual art provided by Lippard, Harrison, Buchloh and Wall are important in many respects—often in fact still constituting the most substantial critical positions on aspects of the period—they are not without flaws, flaws which alternative genealogies of conceptual art need to correct. The authority that has accrued to these first hand accounts has produced a situation where the historiography proper of conceptual art appears to be revisionist, precisely because it challenges the authority of participant observers.

Characterising conceptual art proved controversial from the very beginning. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler's article "The Dematerialization of Art" (1968) noted the emergence of an "ultra-conceptual art" opposed to a previous generation's "emotional/intuitive" artistic strategies, opining that: "such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may well result in the object becoming wholly obsolete."⁵⁹ Terry Atkinson, on behalf of Art & Language, immediately critiqued Lippard and Chandler's metaphoric use of the term "dematerialization." For Atkinson, already employing the pedantic yet ironic tone that would come to characterise much of Art & Language's output, "dematerialization" was *strictu sensu* "the conversion... of a state of matter into that of radiant energy" and consequently "if one were to speak of an art-form

that used radiant matter, then one would be committed to the contradiction of speaking of a formless form.”⁶⁰

This critique did not stop Lippard from publishing an anthology of “so-called conceptual or information or idea art” in 1973 that explicitly used dematerialization as the conceptual basis for its periodising claim (*Six years: The Dematerialization of the art object from 1966-72*). Lippard did however publish an excerpt from Atkinson’s letter in the volume and has subsequently conceded Atkinson’s point in her preface to the 1997 reissue of the original: “it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term... but for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a de-emphasis on material aspects.”⁶¹ Such a concession leaves her claim to critically characterise conceptual art looking underfounded with the result that *Six years* is reduced to the status of a loose historical compendium, a fact Lippard perversely affirms as a point of principle.⁶²

If Lippard’s claims are self-admittedly too broadly founded then Charles Harrison’s work actively embraces the opposite danger. Having taken up the role of in-house historian for Art & Language, Harrison’s critical neutrality was necessarily and openly disavowed for an activist commitment to a particular critical politics from an Art & Language point of view. Notwithstanding his explicit partiality, Harrison’s critique of loose definitions of conceptual art is apposite:

There was talk of a ‘Dematerialization of Art,’ of a ‘Post-Object Art,’ and so on. It can also be said that the supposed ‘critique’ of the art object on which various artists were engaged... was not addressed to all art objects in general

but specifically to the high-art object as construed in the Modernist theory of the 1950s and early 1960s... I mean to suggest that Conceptual art can be distinguished by the different focus of its critique of Modernism and of its typical object.⁶³

For Harrison, much conceptual art is in fact simply an extension of the logic of minimalism: “In their American forms at least – ‘Conceptual art’ and ‘Dematerialization’ were secondary historicist consequences of the qualitative shift which Minimalism represented... this ‘post-Minimal’, anti-formal art was characterised by nothing so much as its reaction to negative example.”⁶⁴ Harrison is unfailingly hostile to minimalism: “the Minimalist downgrading of relations within the work was... the means by which the Minimal object established a relation of compatibility with the representing institution – a type of institution for which the modern American museum was the token.”⁶⁵ In Harrison’s view, minimalist art, and by extension the type of conceptual art which he asserts was the direct descendent of it, was complicit with its recuperation by the art system: “sections of the supposedly anti-Modernist avant-garde were able to represent themselves as subverting the system while in truth meshing the more closely with its operations as the curators of themselves.”⁶⁶

On Harrison’s account conceptual art proper emerged only in Art & Language’s work. Insisting that art had “disappeared into the conceptualisations of its discourse” Art & Language were to draw the conclusion that “it was the inquiry which therefore had to become ‘the work.’”⁶⁷ Harrison recognises that this did not entail avoiding production of material objects, asserting that the task “was not to invent a form of high art without objects – logically speaking, an absurd enough idea – but rather to

evade in practice those predicates which the beholder was wont to attach to the objects of his attention.”⁶⁸ Such a “suppression” of the beholder was necessary not only as a completion of the negation of Modernism (as conceived on Greenbergian and, subsequently, Friedian lines) but also as the grounds of any possibility of constituting new constituencies for art. For Art & Language the displacement of the beholder was “the pursuit... of the idea of a public that was intellectually and not just culturally franchised.”⁶⁹ What Harrison’s account refuses to countenance however is the suggestion that post-minimal conceptual art might enact a genuine or effective critique of the institutions with which he asserts it was simply complicit. This then is the ground of his difference from Buchloh’s highly influential account of the character and significance of conceptual art.

Buchloh’s account of the origins and development of conceptual art remains, if no longer hegemonic, the dominant critical position and the one from which or against which subsequent debates have most clearly developed. Buchloh traces conceptual art’s origins to an “aesthetic of administration” and describes its development into a “critique of institutions.”⁷⁰ According to this well-known account, conceptual art subjected art (understood as that which elicited “traditional aesthetic experience”) to the “vernacular of administration” wherein “administration” is understood as a direct mimicry of “the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality.”⁷¹ Buchloh traces this aesthetic of administration from its origins in post-minimalism (Morris, LeWitt) to what is taken to be its exemplification in Joseph Kosuth’s tautologous definition of the work of art. Buchloh asserts that the triumph of such an

aesthetic of administration was followed by an extension of its logic which nevertheless also constituted a critique: “That was the moment when Buren’s and Haacke’s work from the late 1960s onward turned the violence of that mimetic relationship back onto the ideological apparatus itself, using it to analyze and expose the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place.”⁷² This development, while an advance over the essentially affirmative character of an aesthetic of administration nevertheless remains highly ambiguous. For Buchloh, developing an Adornian thematic, it is unclear whether conceptual art simply colludes in the subjection of aesthetic experience to the logic of the totally administered world leaving none of art’s traditional autonomy, none of its resistance to the logic of commodity production under capitalist social relations.⁷³ Furthermore, Buchloh concludes his assessment of conceptual art by gloomily reflecting on the return of the traditional medium-specific, aesthetic art that conceptual art had sought to invalidate.

Here though Buchloh seems unduly pessimistic in that he fails to account for the fact that conceptual art remains a permanent challenge to the validity of the return of the “displaced painterly and sculptural paradigms of the past.” It is not clear that painting and sculpture return *as art*, that is as a paradigm, rather than as commodities, unable to convincingly ground their claims to art status. Buchloh’s otherwise dialectical elaboration also seems to grind to a halt in the un-historical fixity of such an absolutised “return” and, given its melancholic insistence on *posthistoire*, may now simply look hostage to its postmodern moment of articulation.

Buchloh's avowed pessimism can also perhaps be traced to another source, namely as a covert response to Jeff Wall's pointed critique of Buchloh's critical position *prior* to "Conceptual Art 1962–69." For Wall, Buchloh's earlier work on conceptual artists including Dan Graham, Daniel Buren and Michael Asher could best be described as a "functionalism" characterised by the requirement that advanced art act "as an element of social planning for liberated order."⁷⁴ According to Wall, in Buchloh's position "the negativity of the Adorno-Horkheimer position is combined uncomfortably with the activism of Walter Benjamin's Brechtian writings."⁷⁵ Wall notes that in such a confusion of incompatible positions Buchloh's work shared the conceptual flaw of much New Left thinking.

While Buchloh does not abandon his "functionalism" in the face of Wall's criticisms there is a strong sense in which his subsequent history of conceptual art takes them on board and is inflected by them (albeit without acknowledging this directly) such that the effectiveness of conceptual art's "critique of institutions" is viewed, from the perspective of the present, as historically foreclosed, suggesting a move away from his original attempt to hold on to an ideal of activism and towards what Wall, arguably inaccurately, characterises as Adorno's "defeatism."⁷⁶ In reality, Adorno insisted on the radical uncertainty of art as a corollary of the irrevocability of its autonomy. That art exists at all is due to its dialectic with anti-art (albeit an inherently degenerative one): "If all art is the secularization of transcendence, it participates in the dialectic of enlightenment. Art has confronted this dialectic with the aesthetic conception

of antiart; indeed, without this element art is no longer thinkable. This implies nothing less than that art must go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to that concept.”⁷⁷

Wall uses Buchloh, Benjamin and Adorno as foils for his own account of the development and significance of conceptual art. In so doing he does not always give a persuasive characterisation of his sources. Wall ventriloquizes unconvincingly when he claims, “For Buchloh the dematerialization of art into a more direct form of critical cognition is the essential achievement of conceptualism” since for Buchloh, in his mature account of conceptual art at least, it was only in the turn to a critique of its enabling material and discursive institutions that conceptual art evaded complicity with the logic of administration.⁷⁸ Wall’s critique of Buchloh’s account of conceptual art is principally a device with which to hone his own version of the history. For Wall, conceptual art can best be characterised with reference to its “mimicry” and its “exhibitionism.” Its mimicry consists in deploying “the discourses of academicism, publicity and architecture,” against the traditional “image or object” of art.⁷⁹ Historically however, for Wall, “publicity” is the dominant discourse into which “academicism” and “architecture” have been incorporated. Consequently conceptual art, in mimicking the devices of publicity in its attack on aesthetic art, unwittingly conspired in the broader social process of the reification and instrumentalisation of critical language. Here in fact Wall and Buchloh are in accord. Wall’s account of conceptual art’s “exhibitionism” is the point at which they diverge.

For Wall, “Conceptualism’s exhibition strategy” self-consciously presented the “museum-gallery system” as the crucial social arena of this synthesis of discourses.⁸⁰ This is held to be inseparable from the “appropriation of existing media forms such as magazines, TV or billboards.”⁸¹ Yet, and this is the crucial point for Wall, such a strategy, rather than representing a recovery of the historical avant-gardes’ project to reconnect art and life via a critique of corporatised social institutions—as Buchloh insists it did—merely staged the limit of conceptual art’s criticality: “conceptual art carries only the mortified remains of social art silenced by three decades of capitalist war, political terror and ‘prosperity’ out into the city. Its display of these remains can only be exhibitionistic...”⁸²

Here though much centres on how one conceives the social content of art. For Wall social content seems to be construed in opposition to formalism. Reflecting on conceptual art’s incomplete negation of minimalism he observes, “conceptual art is still far from free of the negative formalism which has disappointed it.”⁸³ Nevertheless, from an Adornian perspective, formalism is not incompatible with social content, quite the opposite in fact since the conventionally presented social content of realism has become complicit with the forces of reaction: “Art struggles against this kind of collusion by excluding through its language of form that remainder of affirmation maintained by social realism: This is the social element in radical formalism.”⁸⁴

Wall’s account of conceptual art proves most useful then from the perspective of its genealogy rather than its teleology. For Wall, conceptual art emerged

from the “reflection on the institutionalization of a radical but still puristic Minimal art” and was linked to “the concurrent revival of Critical Theory on the New Left.”⁸⁵ Wall’s persuasive elaboration of the links between conceptual art and Critical Theory (broadly construed) provides useful ground on which to situate an examination of the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art.

If Lippard’s curatorial energy and catalysing role in the documentation of conceptual art was highly significant, her own theoretical claims for “dematerialization” as a critical conceptualisation of conceptual art have been less so. Consequently it is Harrison’s, Buchloh’s and Wall’s accounts of conceptual art that have largely set the terms of the critical debate. All three are, as has been noted, historical accounts by participant observers. Consequently they occupy the unstable discursive ground between art critical and art historical discourse. Nevertheless, the historiography “proper” of conceptual art has modelled its interventions according to the broad terms established by these three accounts. A central axis for many more recent interventions has however involved disputing these earlier accounts’ narration of conceptual art’s “failure.”

Unresolved Problems of Conceptual Art

Despite having reconfigured their social and artistic landscapes, both conceptual art and the New Left are frequently held to constitute failed projects. The New Left, it is argued, did not bring about a lasting social revolution, nor did conceptual art bring about a lasting artistic one. The forces of counter-revolution overcame the artistic and political insurgencies of the late 1960s. Ultimately, it is concluded, both conceptual art and the New Left were recuperated by the social systems that they challenged. As Buchloh has infamously remarked, “the Enlightenment triumph of Conceptual Art—its transformation of audiences, its abolition of object status and commodity form—would most of all only be short-lived...”⁸⁶ Harrison provides a strikingly similar formulation: “It would also be true to say that the degeneration of conceptual art as a form of cultural project largely coincided with the degeneration of the movements of '68 and with the gradual reimposition of Cold War culture in a more sophisticated form.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, Harrison observes “If the moment of the later 1960s was a form of failed cultural revolution, there could be no doubt about the success of the counter-revolutionary culture which was the culture of the 1980s.”⁸⁸ Wall is perhaps even more brutal than either Harrison or Buchloh—he dates the failure of conceptual art practically to its inception:

The anti-objects of conceptualism were ‘absorbed’ and ‘negated’ (to use the Marcusean terms of the period) as critical intervention by the aura of value imposed upon them by speculation. Conceptual art’s feeble response to the clash of its political fantasies with the real economic conditions of the art world marks out its historical limit as critique... What is unique about conceptual art is its reinvention of defeatism; of the indifference always implicit in puristic or formalist art. The grey volumes of conceptualism are filled with sombre ciphers

which express primarily the inexpressibility of socially-critical thought in the form of art.⁸⁹

Yet although Wall undertakes extensive discussion of Benjamin and Adorno, and notwithstanding his insistence on the close relationship between conceptual art and the New Left, Wall makes only this single, fleeting, allusion to Marcuse's work. Given that Marcuse is arguably the most important theoretical influence on the New Left such an oversight is puzzling. Its origin perhaps lies in the fact that that Marcuse himself had relatively little to say on the development of the postformalist visual arts. Yet neither Adorno nor Benjamin commented on an art after modernism whereas Marcuse's thought did enter "artworld" debates in the 60s, both directly through Marcuse's contributions to art magazines (summarising the central features of his aesthetics) and indirectly via Jack Burnham's systems aesthetics which was inflected by his reading of Marcuse's philosophy.⁹⁰

Furthermore, and this is something neither Wall, nor Harrison nor Buchloh reflect on, the neutralization of the New Left critique was not achieved without cost to the established order: recuperation didn't proceed without incident, capitalism and its threatened social systems had to thoroughly remake themselves in the face of the social movements of the 1960s. Defeating the challenge to the established order involved refounding that order in an altered form. Advanced industrial capitalism was compelled to refashion itself, reanimated by a new spirit.⁹¹ In fact, in a morbid *détournement* of *détournement*, counter-revolutionary forces actually took up revolutionary social demands all the better to oppose them. This, then, was no simple *rappel à l'ordre*, but rather a

fundamental reorganisation of advanced industrial capitalism along new lines for which the name postfordism has now been widely, if not universally, adopted. This dynamic was noted by Marcuse at the beginning of the 1970s. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse noted the “preventive” measures taken up by the counter-revolution stimulated by the cultural revolution: “Capitalism reorganizes itself to meet the threat of a revolution which would be the most radical of all historical revolutions. It would be the first truly *world-historical* revolution.”⁹² Where, however, Marcuse now looks mistaken is in his suggestion that anti-aesthetic art (of which conceptual art was the vanguard) was unconsciously complicit with a reorganised advanced industrial capitalism because both represented the destruction of traditional high culture which Marcuse claimed, rather tenuously in light of his earlier insights on the affirmative character of culture, resisted its bourgeois context by virtue of an ultimately “antibourgeois” character.⁹³ Here Marcuse risked simply affirming aesthetic art ignoring the necessary dialectic of art and anti-art persuasively laid out by Adorno.

Demonstrably then, conceptual art and the New Left were events that produced effects that have been constitutive for our contemporary political and artistic situation. Advanced contemporary art understands itself as constitutively post-conceptual, advanced contemporary politics proposes itself as distinctively, if tendentiously, “post-political.” In this sense, conceptual art and the New Left succeeded, if only in order to fail. Conceptual art and the New Left succeeded in fundamentally remapping the terrain of art and politics but, by not securing this new terrain, are held to have failed.

It is worth emphasising that such an assessment must take the form of a retrospective totalisation (in greater or lesser bad faith with the movements' original aims). Conceptual art and the New Left "fail" only from the perspective of the present, their failure depends on the present's continued inadequation to their challenge, that is on the continuing artistic and political shortcomings of the present. In fairness to Wall, he insists on the failure of conceptual art while also noting the dialectical potential of this failure: "This failed and unresolved aspect of conceptualism remains crucial. The movement appears today above all as incomplete."⁹⁴ Yet Wall, in noting the "social ascendancy of Pop" with "its compulsive and unreflective mimicry of all forms of culture" at the expense of the "conceptualist struggle," ultimately submits to the force of an ascendant (reactionary) postmodernism.⁹⁵ This postmodern logic continues to stand as the prevailing cultural periodisation of the present (even as its critical purchase no longer feels secure). Here, then, postmodern theory can be understood, following Habermas, as an ultimately conservative ideology of counter-revolution.

Consequently, the question of how to both produce and theorise a genuine "contemporary" art presents itself as increasingly urgent. The consequence of failing to endow conceptual art with sufficient determinacy is that its possibilities are subjected to premature closure in a peremptory account of its "failure." This situation results in the persistent problem of having to perpetually cast subsequent waves of advanced art production (that is, art that is both ontologically and politically ambitious) as lying in a 'neo' relation to an

authentic, originary moment of conceptual art which, on closer inspection, reveals itself to have been riven with its own competing claims to origination and authenticity.

Hal Foster summarises the problem precisely, though draws the wrong conclusion: “The 1990s and 2000s have witnessed various attempts to recover unfinished projects of the 1960s as well – that is, to set up a further “neo” relation of recovery vis-à-vis Conceptual, Process and Body art in particular. Yet this work has not yet demonstrated whether critiques as singular as Conceptual, Process, and Body art can be transformed into a tradition (or tradition substitute) coherent enough to support contemporary practice.”⁹⁶ Foster accurately diagnoses the fatigue of the ‘neo’ relation but fails to realise that this fatigue is the necessary result of the perpetual search for artistic and critical novelty that he himself subconsciously instantiates. This requirement to produce the new is structural to a modernism that Foster claims to have overcome and the rhetorical impulse towards its development here leads Foster to make the surprising claim that conceptual art constituted a highly “singular” critique. Only the narrowest reading of conceptual art—as Anglo-American analytic conceptual art perhaps—could render a global artistic movement directed against a variety of art, mainstream media and socio-political institutions “singular.” It is in fact demonstrably just such a narrow reading of conceptual art that leads to the necessity of asserting its failure.

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In considering the unresolved problems of conceptual art it quickly becomes clear that we need to indicate exactly which “conceptual art” we are referring to. At the least this involves distinguishing between analytical, or ‘strong,’ conceptual art and a more inclusive conceptual art. If inclusive conceptual art can be read as developing from Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (which remains a transitional, object-producing practice), then analytical conceptual art comes to focus exclusively on the propositional definition of the concept of art, principally through the work of Joseph Kosuth and *Art & Language*. Analytical conceptual art is famously hostile toward more inclusive conceptual art for what it perceives as its residual aestheticism—hence Kosuth’s categorisation of his own art as “Theoretical Conceptual Art” and that of other conceptual artists as “Stylistic Conceptual Art.”⁹⁷ Yet analytical conceptual art faltered with the discredited linguistic positivism on which it depended philosophically. Apparently then conceptual art’s success (demonstrating that art and aesthetics are not coincident) was precisely its failure (the realisation that they cannot finally be distinguished comprehensively).⁹⁸

Joseph Kosuth reflected on conceptual art and the problems it raised in his contribution to the catalogue for Jack Burnham’s *Software* show produced at the Jewish Museum in 1970 (Burnham’s first and last curatorial endeavour). For Kosuth, his art consisted of “placing this activity (investigation) in an art context (i.e. art as idea as *idea*).” This was not to be confused with the inevitable

decisions of taste he exhibited when installing his investigations. He expanded on this:

This problem exists because of the still prevalent belief that there is a conceptual connection between art and aesthetics—thus it becomes assumed that there is artistic relevance to my choices based on taste. Fifty years from now if my idea of art is extant it will be so only through the activities of living artists, and the taste I showed in my choices of the installation for this show will be dated and irrelevant.⁹⁹

Kosuth's "idea of art" is not very evident in the activities of artists, less than forty years after he staked his claim to posterity. However conceptual art's critical legacy should not be confused with the contemporary standing of Joseph Kosuth's work, nor even with Art & Language's broader account of conceptual art with which he is connected, albeit contentiously.¹⁰⁰ Other conceptual artist's idea of art is very much alive in the work of living artists.

Returning then to Kosuth's admonishment and inflecting its terms we might generate the following formula: "if an idea of art is extant, it will be so only through the activities of living artists." This neat formulation is apparently complicated by the fact that most of the first generation of conceptual artists are themselves still alive and making work and thus might be expected to be continuing their own "idea of art" themselves. As Liam Gillick has observed (no doubt considering the status of his own relation to conceptual art): "most conceptual artists are still alive and can be questioned in person..."¹⁰¹ To the extent to which they have worked through the implications of their own practice from the late 60s and 70s, rather than repeating it in a reified fashion

(as Wall accuses Barry of doing), then they might be considered to keep the idea of conceptual art extant in their own practice.

Here then we need to extend the account of conceptual art beyond this opposition of the inclusive and the analytical, at a minimum giving “inclusive” conceptual art greater historical specificity. Buchloh’s caution continues to obtain: “Precisely because of this range of implications of Conceptual Art, it would seem imperative to resist a construction of its history in terms of a stylistic homogenization, which would limit that history to a group of individuals and a set of strictly defined practices and historical interventions (such as, for example, the activities initiated by Seth Siegelaub in New York in 1968 or the authoritarian quests for orthodoxy by the English Art & Language group).”¹⁰²

Despite his own caution, Buchloh’s account remains overdetermined by precisely the suspects he names, such that conceptual art’s “failure” is glossed through the failure of its anti-aesthetic aspect: “the specular regime, which Conceptual Art claimed to have upset, would soon be reinstated with renewed vigour.”¹⁰³ Though Buchloh considers non analytic conceptual artists (Sol LeWitt, Edward Ruscha, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke) it is ultimately from the standpoint of Anglo-American analytic conceptual art that he totalises the “movement.” His account ultimately fails to register the significance of diverse conceptual practices. In fact, the narrow context of Buchloh’s account, as well as its neglect of any broader social and cultural context, has been challenged by Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub. Kosuth and Siegelaub’s response to

Buchloh presents a long list of “actors ‘missing in action’... who contributed, in one way or another, to the formation of the art historical moment called, for lack of a better term, ‘Conceptual Art’...”¹⁰⁴ Buchloh’s account is ultimately too narrow. In contrast, Jack Burnham (one of those named as missing by Siegelau) had emphasised the “multitudinous forms of Conceptualism.”¹⁰⁵

A related problem is simply to assert that conceptual art constitutes an “unfinished project” which might simply be resumed in the present. Michael Newman illuminates the problems with this approach by demonstrating that conceptual art “needs to be continually reinvented in order to stay one step ahead of its own reification” and consequently that “how to do so without entering into alliance with the actually existing forces of reaction remains the problem all neo-conceptual art has to face.”¹⁰⁶

Yet any definitive specification of the post-conceptual character of contemporary art depends on having identified all that was significant in the history and legacy of conceptual art. Given historical changes in the perceived critical effectiveness of conceptual art it seems probable that any account of post-conceptual art will also be obliged to reconsider its terms in order that it continues to remain critical in the face of historical developments in the concept of art. Doing so involves combining the work of historical recovery and reassessment, deploying the necessary theoretical resources to determine the critical significance of what one uncovers. It will be the *unresolved* problems of conceptual art that are of interest.

A second wave of conceptual art historiography (which is, in fact, properly speaking, the first) has focused on developing an account of these unresolved problems within conceptual art. Summarising the overall tenor of recent scholarly contributions to the debate on art after conceptual art, Alexander Alberro asserts that the new scholarship “dispute[s] claims, made as early as Rosalind Krauss’s “Sense and Sensibility” (1973) and continuing in various form in the present, that this art movement was merely a period style that has had its day. Instead... although in highly reconfigured forms, it thrives today more than ever before.”¹⁰⁷ Recent scholarship has sought to argue for an enlarged canon of conceptual art as well as for its ongoing relevance to contemporary art. Here, three broad argumentative strategies can be discerned: (i) *Inclusion*: an insistence on the “conceptual” status of artists not formerly considered within the rubric; (ii) *Expansion*: a geographical extension of the boundaries where a legitimately “conceptual” art is deemed to have appeared; (iii) *Differentiation*: a finer differentiation of “canonical” Anglo-American conceptual art, such that the category itself is rendered more nuanced. As Alberro insists, there are “many histories and legacies of Conceptualism” and the genealogy of conceptual art has multiple “strands.”¹⁰⁸

Luis Camnitzer has been instrumental in the development of an expanded geographical account of conceptual art. In 1999 Camnitzer co-curated (with Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss) the exhibition “Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s,” a show which insisted that the category of conceptual art should not be restricted to American and Western European artists. More recently Camnitzer has published *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of*

Liberation (2007) where he argues for a distinctively Latin American conceptual art, an art more markedly political than its Western counterpart, one emphasising “contextualisation” over “dematerialization.” Camnitzer also reflects on the markedly more “sensorial” quality of Latin American conceptual art. He even goes as far as to argue, in certain respects, for the *priority* of Latin American Conceptualism. Camnitzer productively stresses the importance of artists hailing from Latin America. Nevertheless, the regionalist character of Camnitzer’s claims militates against his own earlier insistence on the global quality of conceptual art and misrepresents the importance of the transnational context from which it emerged.

Alberro’s own work combines the strategies of expansion and differentiation, but with the latter strategy paradoxically taking on the character of a restrictive definition of conceptual art that seems to sit awkwardly with the former. In his article “A Media Art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s” Alberro outlines artistic strategies whereby Latin American artists appropriated “ready-made media forms and structures”, in some cases “recharging them with a radical and often political content.”¹⁰⁹ For Alberro this “forms the particular character of Latin American Conceptual art” making it “uniquely relevant to the history of Conceptual and Post-Conceptual practices everywhere.”¹¹⁰ In his *Conceptual art and the Politics of Publicity*, Alberro makes advertising the “model” for conceptual art, deriving this account from the innovative promotional strategies crafted by Seth Siegelau for the stable of artists he represented (Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry and Douglas Huebler). By fleshing out a single episode in the development of conceptual art—one already

discussed by both Buchloh and Wall—but characterising this as exemplary, Alberro's history effectively restricts the category of conceptual art. Though Alberro acknowledges the geographical, temporal and gender limits that his strategy imposes on his study, this does not mitigate the overarching character of his claims.

Furthermore, Alberro's provocative thesis inverts the conventional claim that these artists subverted the advertising strategies they deployed in favour of an argument which asserts that, caught up in a new moment of advanced capitalism, conceptual art simply produced a new class of managerial artist: “the egalitarian pursuit of publicness and the emancipation from traditional forms of artistic value were as definitive as the fusion of the artwork with advertising and display.”¹¹¹ Consequently, borrowing from Antonio Negri's work, Alberro asserts that conceptual art effectively utilizes and enacts a “deeper logic of informatization.”¹¹² That “informatization” is, in Negri, a synonym for postmodernisation is not developed by Alberro with the result that the crucial question of how conceptual art should be thought in relation to modernism is omitted. Here Alberro's work suffers by not situating Negri's own work, and his borrowings from it, within its post-Marxist context of articulation. Consequently, Alberro lacks Wall's attention to the detail of the relation between conceptual art and Critical Theory.

Sabeth Buchmann also makes use of Negri in her study treating art's relation to advanced industrial, or postfordist capitalism: *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica*. Buchmann's

study productively restores to focus conceptual art's complex relationship with the Art & Technology movement of the 1960s as well as stressing the importance of Yvonne Rainer and Hélio Oiticica to a full history of conceptual art. Consequently her work embodies strategies of inclusion and differentiation. Buchmann situates the development of conceptual art against the backdrop of the shift from an industrial to an advanced industrial economy (or from a fordist to a postfordist one, as she characterises it borrowing Negri's articulation). Rather than Alberro's restricted analogy with the logic of "informatization" then, Buchmann produces a more nuanced account of conceptual art's relationship to the development of the forces of production.

Consequently Buchmann is more ambivalent than Alberro on the issue of whether conceptual art should be regarded as something like the vanguard of immaterial labour: "It is relevant then to ask whether the convergence of conceptualism, new technologies and systems theory actually contributed to the building of the "social factory" which Hardt and Negri describe as an enlargement and modification of factory-oriented labour."¹¹³ Buchmann forestalls judgment, noting, only that conceptual art "was able to effectively touch significant questions concerning the relation between the new technologies, art market and corporate culture."¹¹⁴

Taking a different, though related approach, Branden Joseph's recent work has sought to argue for the importance of John Cage's critical legacy for the development of North American art. Though in the context of a discussion of Henry Flynt and Tony Conrad's "Concept art" (which Joseph clearly

distinguishes, both temporally and thematically, from a later conceptual art), Joseph has a suggestive remark to make on Cage's significance that does bear on the development of conceptual art: "It was against what Adorno saw as capitulation to the forces of instrumental reason that he accorded Cage and his followers, in their invocations of chance and indeterminacy, a certain critical dimension of protesting, however ineffectively, "the terrorism of the phenomenon which has come to be known by the phrase 'the technological age.'""¹¹⁵ Cage's emphasis on chance and indeterminacy will also be significant for conceptual art as it emerges from minimalism and process art.¹¹⁶ Joseph's suggestive move is to link the history of post-Cagean 1960s art practice to Adorno's insight about the development of instrumental reason in a technological age, an insight Marcuse developed explicitly as a "technological rationality."¹¹⁷

Liz Kotz's recent study *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* constructs an account of the development of conceptual art proper from roots in "post-Cagean aesthetics. Nevertheless her work depends on Buchloh's characterisation of conceptual art as primarily linguistic. She notes the necessity to distinguish conceptual artists' use of language from the earlier deployment of language-based artistic strategies in Happenings and Fluxus. For Kotz the distinctively "'conceptual' use of language... employed it as both iterative structure and representational medium."¹¹⁸ Noting this particular "turn to language" Kotz inscribes the turn within a broader and "pervasive logic structuring 1960s artistic production."¹¹⁹ This is characterised by the fact that "A "general" template or notational system—be it musical scores, fabrication

instructions, architectural blueprints or diagrams, or schematic representations—generates “specific” realizations in different contexts.”¹²⁰ Kotz even accounts for conceptual artists’ use of photography in linguistic terms, noting, reciprocally, that language was conceived in “photographic” terms.¹²¹

While Kotz’s insights about conceptual artists use of language and photography as part of a broader systemic logic of artistic articulation are suggestive her insights ultimately remain overdetermined by their inscription within the thematic frame of her text. Kotz does not break with a “linguistic” account of conceptual art even as she develops a more sophisticated reading of how language operated in conceptual art. Consequently her work takes on the character of a restricted differentiation of conceptual art. Ultimately then Kotz’s argument about the broader relation between conceptual art’s deployment of a systemic logic and its relation to its broader social context remains underlaborated.

Despite the range and depth of these more recent contributions to conceptual art scholarship, it is clear that several unresolved problems continue to present themselves. Looking again in close detail at “canonical” Anglo-American conceptual art from the perspective of the present reveals new lines in the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art. The specific approach taken here will be to offer a contribution to the ongoing differentiation of conceptual art that will also, by arguing for a different interpretation of the influence of

individual conceptual artists, constitute a contribution to a more inclusive account.

A Systems Genealogy of Conceptual Art

From the perspective of contemporary, post-postmodern relational and context art (that is, an art focused on the artwork's immanence to its social context and its social relations) conceptual art arguably looks more "systematic" than "analytic," more like (an expanded version of) the "systems art" that emerged from the competing postformalist strategies of 60s art in general and, more particularly, out of a negotiated relationship between minimalism, pop and tech art, than analytic conceptual art, an art of the linguistic proposition, which has remained the dominant critical characterisation of it. As Osborne notes in his survey of conceptual art: "It is conventional to think of conceptual art as Western art's linguistic turn. Yet the conceptual work that emerged out of the minimalist negation of medium by a generic conception of 'objecthood' was less concerned with language than with ideal systems of logical, mathematical and spatio-temporal relations."¹²² Reconsidering the "systems" genealogy of conceptual art illuminates the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art.

Just as Frankfurt School modernism can be opposed to Greenberg's narrow but hegemonic account, giving us a richer account of modernism in the process, so the still-dominant narrative of conceptual art as "analytic" has a revealing alternative in conceptual art as "systematic". This mode of conceptual art, in conceiving the conceptual content of conceptual art quite broadly as a system, rather than more narrowly as an idea, or a linguistic proposition, came to focus on the context of art, on art's interrelation with other social systems. From an initial concern merely to avoid subjective compositional methods by the use of

a system, a systematic conceptual art subsequently sought to relate art to the art system, the art system to the social system and, ultimately, though precariously, to the totality of the capitalist system. Systematic conceptual art was a *politicised* and *critical* mode, one that sought to secure art's autonomy by combining an ontological and a political challenge to a still dominant aesthetic paradigm.

Such an interpretation of conceptual art, while not unremarked in the existing scholarship, remains under-theorised. Lippard notes that, "For artists looking to restructure perception and the process/product relationship of art, information and systems replaced traditional formal concerns of composition, colour, technique, and physical presence. Systems were laid over life the way a rectangular format is laid over the seen [sic] in paintings, for focus."¹²³ Robert Morgan has pointed out "A number of artists became involved in the use of systems and seriation as an anti-Formalist method and as a means to get beyond the constraints of expressive ordering."¹²⁴ Similarly, Wall has observed that "Conceptual art," in constructing its critique of formalism by means of a turn toward reality, employed "a strategy of active intervention into the existing complex of social forces constituted by urban communication and representation systems."¹²⁵

Yet this "systematic" reading of conceptual art finds its earliest expression in the work of the critic Jack Burnham, specifically in a series of "systems" essays written between 1968 and 1970.¹²⁶ Kosuth notes Burnham's priority here: "With the exception of two articles by Jack Burnham, conceptual art was by and large ignored during this period [the late 60s]."¹²⁷ Burnham's attempt to

theorise the emergent moment of conceptual art through a “systems aesthetics” again proves of interest today in the light of contemporary claims for a “relational aesthetics.” It is revealing that in her early interviews with artists who were to become known as “conceptual,” Patricia Norvell features Burnham heavily in her questioning and most of the artists take up a position either explicitly in accordance with, or strongly seeking to refute, his theory.¹²⁸ It is precisely at the moment of its emergence then that we might now learn most about “conceptual art,” that is before it was even named and marketed as “conceptual” art as such. Burnham pointed to the way in which the ideal systems of logical, mathematical and spatio-temporal relations that characterised early post-minimalist work were expanded in character to include physical, biological and, crucially, social systems (predominantly, but not exclusively in the work of Hans Haacke).¹²⁹ Other artists who explicitly deployed a “systematic” methodology in their practice included Mel Bochner, Douglas Huebler, Hanne Darboven, Adrian Piper, Mary Kelly, and Mierle Lademan Ukeles. Here then a stress on conceptual art’s “systematic” mode reorients the canonical focus, producing a more inclusive and more pertinent account of the conceptual character and critical legacy of conceptual art.

Burnham explained the development of a “systems aesthetic” both in relation to art’s internal development as well as in relation to a broader societal shift towards a systems-oriented, technocratic society. Burnham suggested as early as 1968 that “art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and the components of their environment.”¹³⁰ Compare here Bourriaud’s gloss of relational art as: ‘A set of practices which

take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.¹³¹ The terms could hardly be closer though they are separated by almost four decades.

It has in fact become conventional to link the history of conceptual art to a wider social shift towards an advanced industrial, or postfordist, society. The much-noted political urgency of conceptual art is in a significant sense directly related to it. Furthermore, this social shift and its cultural ramifications in no small part also accounts for the simultaneous, global appearance of conceptual art in the UK, Europe, US and Latin America (in a way that questions traditional art historical attempts to trace artistic movements through the influence of individual movements or practitioners).¹³² Burnham made this parallel from the beginning, explicitly attempting to produce a systems aesthetics in relation to structural changes in “the System.”

Burnham's account of the shift to a systems-oriented society must itself be set in the context of the theories of the development of an ‘advanced’ or ‘post’ industrial society in the West with which it was contemporaneous. Jacques Ellul's fatalistic *The Technological Society* had appeared in translation in 1964, Daniel Bell was shortly to publish his controversial *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1973). Between these two politically opposed readings lay a multitude of others. Arguably though it is the Frankfurt School critical tradition, with its broader historical account of the developmental link between instrumental and technological rationality that constitutes the most

substantial examination of these themes. In this tradition, art is understood as resistant to the logic of technological rationality (which it nonetheless is obliged to mimic) and this is precisely why its status holds such stakes and its uncertainty constitutes such a problem.

Though it is not immediately evident from his systems essays because he does not clearly acknowledge the influence, Burnham's work was explicitly indebted to Marcuse's philosophical aesthetics and account of technological rationality. Burnham sought to frame the advanced art of his day in light of Marcuse's argument concerning the development of an advanced industrial society. Given this fact, it can be seen that Burnham's work not only represents an important early attempt to theorise conceptual art but also, and more significantly, constitutes an alternative account to Greenbergian modernism, one elaborated from a reading of Frankfurt School critical theory. Yet Burnham's theory of systems aesthetics also elided first generation critical theory with first generation systems theory, Burnham relied on Ludwig von Bertalanffy alongside Marcuse. Such an awkward elision compromised the legibility of Burnham's theory.

Nevertheless, Burnham's work proposes a more substantive account of artistic modernism than Greenberg's, one linked to a critical theory of modernity. This early mediation of critical theory in the American context will prove central to the attempt to demonstrate the way in which certain artists and theorists counteracted and moved beyond the 'Greenberg effect' in a historically actual way. Whatever the problems with his theory, it is incontestable that Burnham,

engaging Marcuse, was the first to try and think conceptual art and critical theory together.

Here then we might start to outline a response to Boltanski and Chiapello's challenge to contemporary artists and theorists: "perhaps the artistic critique should, to a greater extent than is currently the case, take the time to reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from the new forms of oppression it unwittingly helped to make possible."¹³³ In order to take up such a challenge in a critical art history it is necessary to revisit the history and theory of conceptual art as the decisive legacy that any contemporary reformulation of artistic critique must negotiate.

2. The Postformal Condition

Last Paintings

Hans Haacke's challenge to the tenets of Greenbergian formalist modernism appeared notably early. His career serves as a trajectory by means of which to orient the systems genealogy of conceptual art. Painted while undertaking studies at Stanley William Hayter's printing atelier in Paris, just before his departure to the Tyler School of Fine Arts in the US on a Fulbright scholarship, *B1-61* (1961) [Fig.1] was to prove Haacke's last painting.¹

B1-61 is stretched on a mid-sized frame, eighty-five centimetres by eighty-five centimetres. Its surface is covered with thin, closely spaced, dashed lines in yellow acrylic. Thirty-nine vertical and thirty-three horizontal lines compose a grid. Slanting upwards from the left-hand side of the canvas at a twenty-degree angle, thirty-four diagonal lines intersect the grid. The lines disrupt the regularity of the picture plane, breaking up the flatness of the support. Since they run only from left to right, the diagonals hint at, but do not resolve into, an orthographic projection. The design of the painting works against any confident identification of the pictorial space as either two or three-dimensional. Its surface oscillates awkwardly, pulling at the eye.

Haacke's completion of *B1-61* followed closely on from the first appearance of "Modernist Painting" (1960), widely considered Greenberg's most important summation of his formalist position. Haacke thus stopped painting just as Greenberg reached the height of his influence. What, then, can *B1-61* tell us about the genealogy of conceptual art?

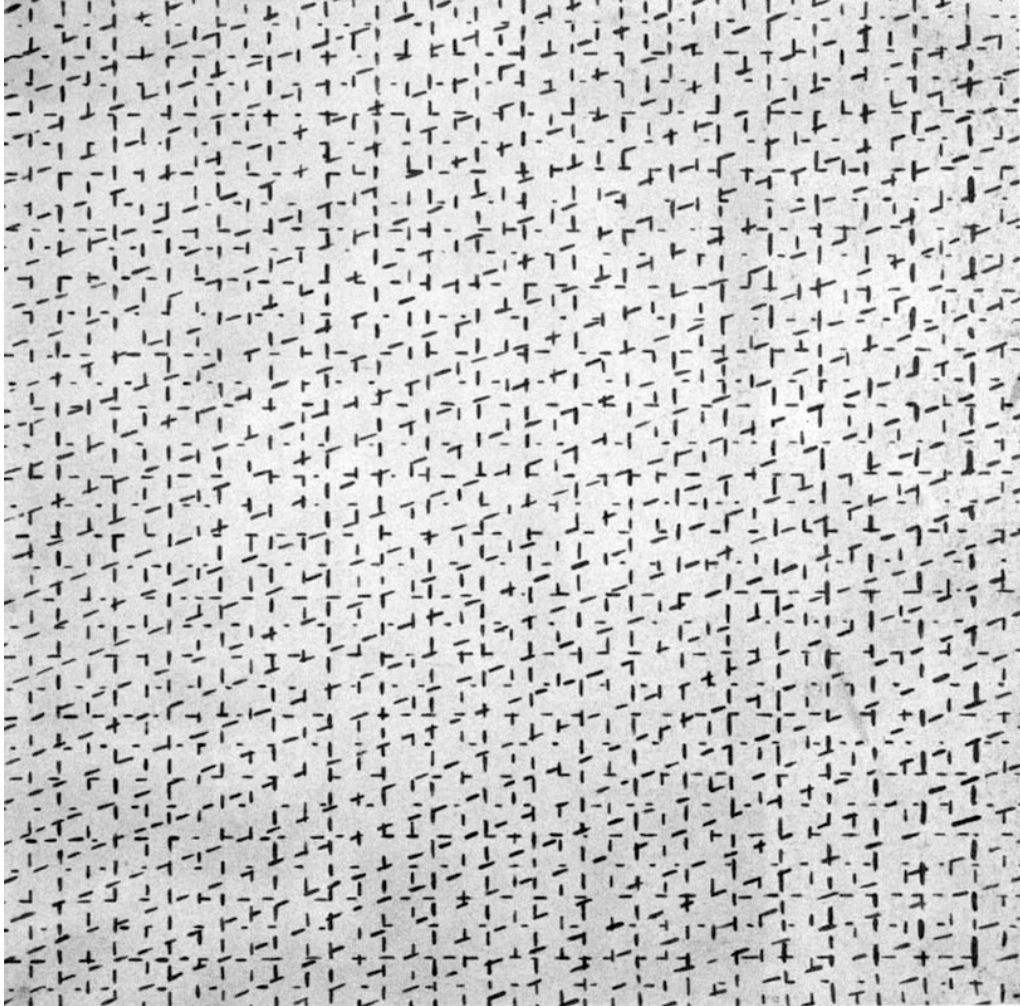


Fig.1. Hans Haacke, *B1-61* (1961).

Though many of the American conceptual artists who emerged through and out of minimalism followed a similar trajectory to Haacke by renouncing medium-specific practice, most were still painting well into the 1960s. Lawrence Weiner worked on a series of *Propeller Paintings* [Fig.2] executed in household paints on canvas and wood from 1960-1965 followed by a series of *Removal Paintings* in spray enamel on geometric notched canvases from 1966–68. Weiner later explained these works with reference to the necessity of working through the conventions of the traditional, medium-specific categories in a deliberate and methodical manner: “Those categories just completely collapsed on me. I wanted them to collapse but I wasn’t going to hasten their collapse. I was going to follow it through to where it collapsed.”² Earlier, he had put it more directly: “Somehow the shit residue of art history made me make paintings and sculptures. But now I feel no contact with or relevance or need for a place in art history.”³ Mel Bochner made a series of untitled grey panel paintings in oil on Masonite until 1965 before moving on to a (transitional) phase of minimal sculpture. He nevertheless remained interested in painting as a problematic throughout his career, returning to medium-specific practice in the 1980s stating, “without the history of the practice of painting as the background for all my work, it becomes a series of disparate gestures.”⁴ Joseph Kosuth was producing word paintings as late as 1966. Mel Ramsden’s series of *100% Abstract* paintings-as-parody-of-painting were executed in 1968. Robert Barry gave up painting in 1968. John Baldessari’s “The Cremation Project” [Fig.3] (a work in which he burnt all of his pre-1966, non-delegated paintings, baking some of the resulting ashes into cookies) was not executed until 1970.



Fig.2. Lawrence Wiener, *Propeller Paintings* (1960-1965).

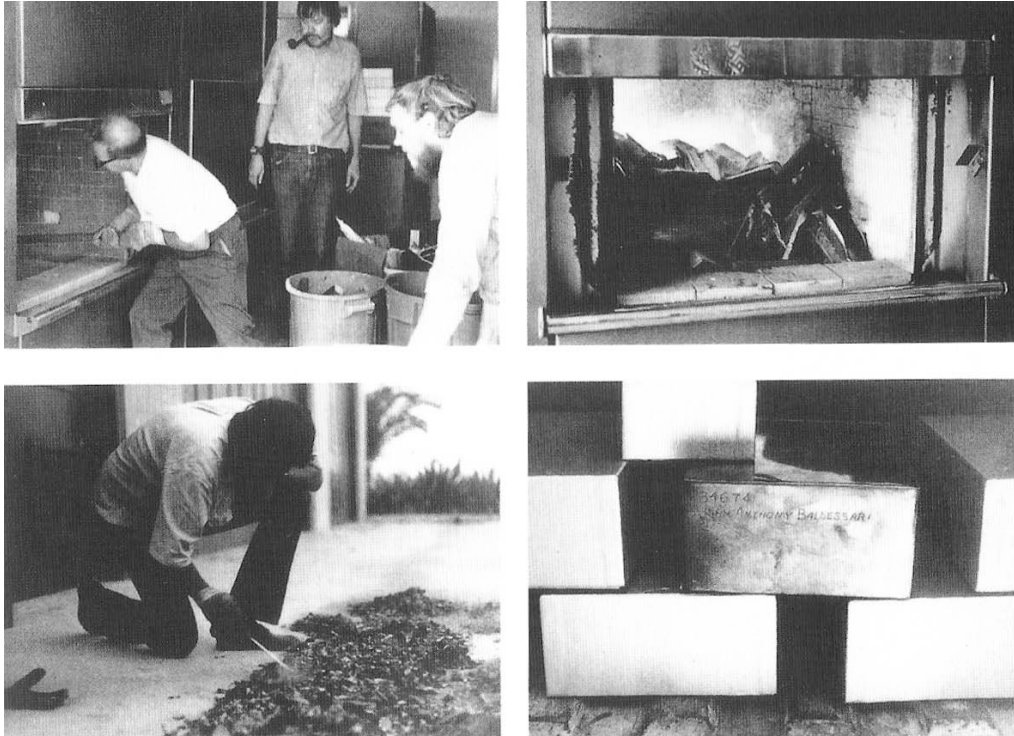


Fig.3. John Baldessari, *The Cremation Project* (1970).

Completed when Haacke was just 25 and not included in his major late-career retrospective “For Real: Works 1959-2006” (2007), *B1-61* is usually considered to be a work of minor importance, juvenilia even. Yet the painting was produced in the same year as a series of mirrored reliefs—*A7-61* (1961), *D6-61* (1961), *A8-61* (1961) [Fig.4] —which are regularly cited by Haacke and his critics as being of formative significance for the evolution of his practice. Writing on the mirror works around the time of their production, the artist stated: “Observing my mirror objects made of polished stainless steel, I note: there is neither a correct nor an incorrect point of view from which to look at them. Their environments—including the spectator—form an integral part of them. The environment is constantly participating in their creation. They are not fixed; their appearances are infinite.”⁵

Although *B1-61* clearly shares the destabilisation of a “correct... point of view” with the mirror reliefs, the painting incorporates the environment not at all and the viewer in a less direct way, namely through a destabilisation of vision more sophisticated than, but superficially similar to, the visual effects solicited by op art. Yet the influences bearing on Haacke’s last painting were less those of op than of the Zero Group and the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (GRAV); that is European avant-garde collectives whose investigations proceeded from a founding interest in kineticism, an approach to art-making inspired in part by Duchamp’s early kinetic works.⁶

The paintings of GRAV member François Morellet were a particular influence on Haacke and this can clearly be seen in *B1-61* which exhibits a clear affinity to

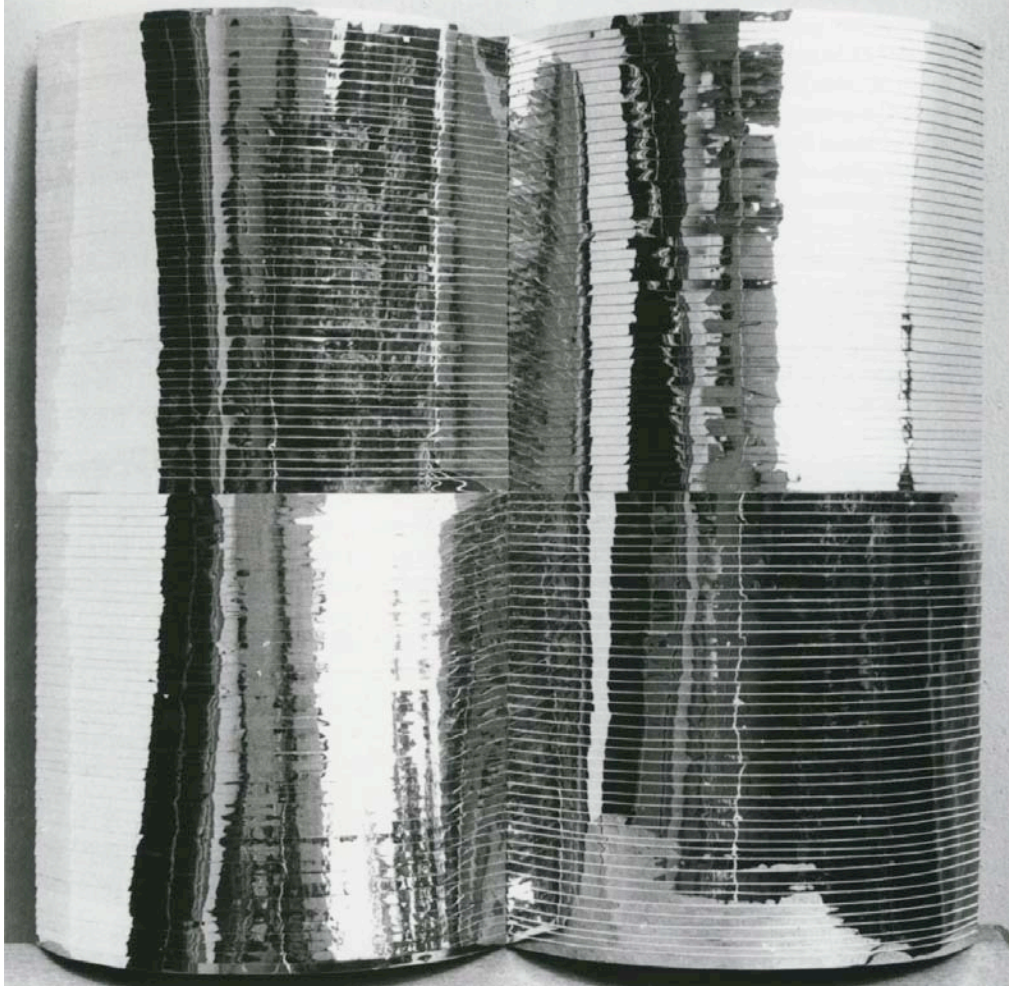


Fig.4. Hans Haacke, *A8-61* (1961).

Morellet's work.⁷ However, we need to pass over questions concerning the originality of Haacke's last painting since its significance for our argument will prove of a different type. *B1-61* is important for two principle reasons: first, its early and emphatic negation, via experiments in systematic composition and viewer engagement, of formalist modernism (as he was departing for its heartland); second, its intimation of the move to externalise systematic relations, out from the framing edge of the painting (where they remain, however residually, a problem of composition) and into the environment (where they become a problem of context).⁸ The painting's argument then is far more important than its formal novelty or aesthetic "quality."

It is instructive to note not only how early but also how precisely *B1-61* refutes Greenberg's terms. Just as the critic was asserting that "for the sake of its own autonomy painting has had to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture," Haacke was making serially produced painting and sculptural reliefs which shared a numbering scheme and the same aims with regard to the incorporation of the spectator.⁹ If, for Greenberg, it was "the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism," Haacke drew attention to the flatness of the support only to disrupt it.¹⁰ In a related manner, Haacke signalled the residual illusionism of painting as a medium (by adumbrating orthographic projection) even as Greenberg was insisting that what modernism had "abandoned in principle" was "the representation of the kind of space that recognizable, three-dimensional objects can inhabit."¹¹ Five years before John

Latham chewed up the Greenbergian rulebook in *Still and Chew: Art and Culture* (1966-67), Haacke had thoroughly defaced its pages.¹²

Here though, remembering that *B1-61* was to some degree derivative of Morellet's work, it is important to insist that Haacke's critique of formalist modernism was not unique. Rather, Haacke's move from Europe to America involved transplanting the critical concerns of a contemporary European avant-garde into the American context. Haacke's early work thus threw the restricted Greenbergian modernism that dominated the establishment art world at the time into relief. The artist insinuated an alternative modernist tradition directly into a New York art world then obsessed with asserting its independence.¹³ A German artist smuggled an alternative modernism past Greenberg's border control.¹⁴

This was a modernism decisively inflected by its self-conscious relation to constructivism and Dada, avant-gardes towards which Greenbergian modernism was hostile. Haacke's US status as a resident alien resonated in more ways than one. Haacke's oblique relation to the received history of conceptual art forms a primary facet of our account of its emergence and development as a systems art. Recovering the systems genealogy of conceptual art requires us to reconceptualise conceptual art. It necessitates questioning the terminological triumph of the very term "conceptual art" which, as Peter Wollen has observed, "eventually superseded that of arte povera, systems art, language art, information art, and so on."¹⁵

In an *October* roundtable on “Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp,” Rosalind Krauss hinted at the importance of this systems genealogy (without then following up on her own insight). In the context of a discussion of the origins of Dan Graham’s investigation of the “art system,” Krauss suggests that it is necessary to consider the immediate precedent inflecting Graham’s investigations: “But all the European artists who are investigating systems in the early 1960s should be factored into this. I’m thinking about Hans Haacke... The systems connections are already developed. What is Haacke’s relation to Duchamp?”¹⁶ Yet it was not only the (belated) reception of Duchamp by New York based artists that contributed to the overthrow of formalist modernism and the formation of conceptual art. Alongside the obligatory acknowledgment of Duchamp’s importance and the much-discussed relation to minimalism and pop, we need to enrich the received account of conceptual art’s development by restoring to view those other artistic influences that inflected it, principally kinetic art and its cognate tech art.

Nor should these artistic developments be abstracted from the social context of the 1960s, characterised as it was by worldwide economic and socio-political upheavals in the system of advanced capitalism, by an intensification of technocracy and by the resistance to this intensification. The art and the social context were of a piece. Indeed, the recognition that art’s social context impacts its character constituted a fundamental tenet of the alternative to formalist modernism. Conceptual artists came to realise, in Adorno’s terms, “Art’s double character,” that is, “its autonomy and *fait social*” a situation “expressed ever and again in the palpable dependencies and conflicts between the two spheres.”¹⁷

By the end of a turbulent decade, Greenbergian formalism was no longer in the ascendant; on the contrary, it no longer seemed credible as a viable theory of advanced art.

Counter Greenberg

In his 1971 article “Counter Avant-Garde,” Greenberg demonstrated just how out of touch with advanced art he had become. The critic began his argument by coining the awkward term “advanced-advanced art” to distinguish a category of avant-gardist art, derived from Duchamp’s example, whose interest was held to be “more historical, cultural, theoretical than it is esthetic” in contradistinction to Greenberg’s own account of “advanced” avant-garde art, for which aesthetics remained essential and Futurism the historical model.¹⁸ Despite having correctly identified an art that was not concerned with aesthetics, Greenberg nevertheless pondered how this could have been the case: “But you can still wonder exactly why it is that all the phenomenal, configurational, and physical newness—why most of it comes out so banal, so empty, so unchallenging to taste. In the past phenomenal newness used almost always to coincide with authentic artistic newness... Why does the equation between phenomenal and esthetic newness no longer seem to hold today?”¹⁹

The obvious conclusion was that “advanced-advanced art” was not aiming to be challenging to taste, but rather to challenge “taste.” Greenberg, however, refused or was unable to conceive an art beyond aesthetics. As he unambiguously expressed it: “art and the esthetic don’t just overlap, they coincide.”²⁰ Given that Robert Morris had framed his *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal* [Fig.5] as early as 1963, Greenberg’s 1971 position reads as wilfully *retardataire*.²¹ Greenberg’s limit-case for formalist modernism had in fact been reached earlier than Morris with the work of Frank Stella and Ad Reinhardt, perhaps the two most significant

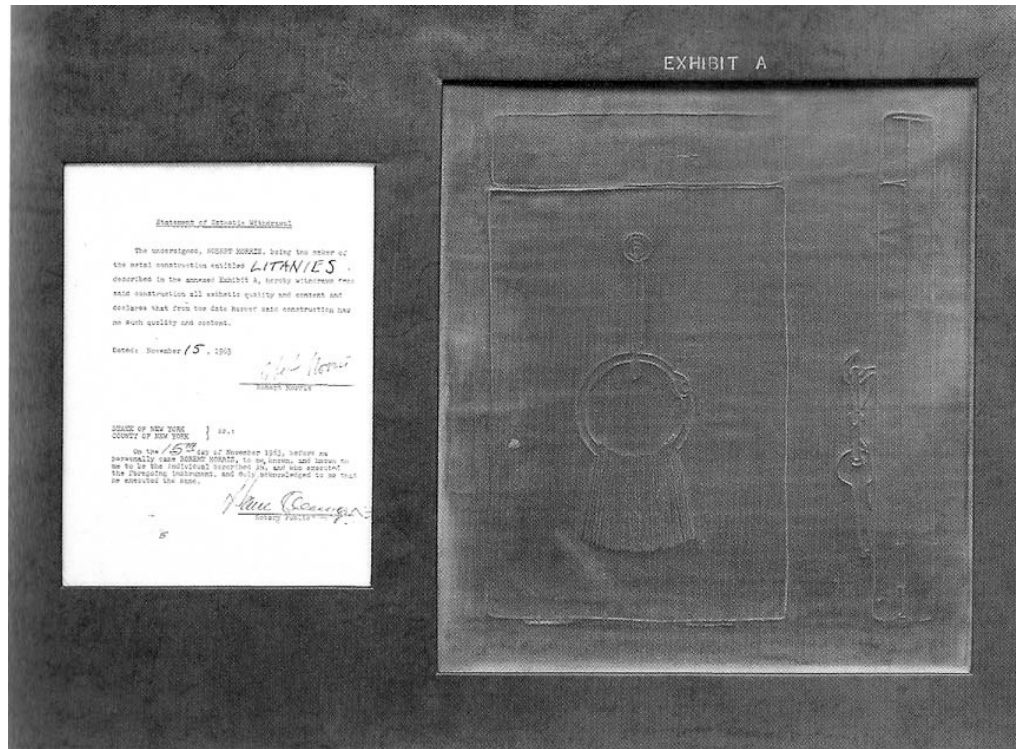


Fig.5. Robert Morris, *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal* (1963).

forebears of minimalism, neither of whom Greenberg would admit to his canon of modernist painting.

Greenberg's intransigent aestheticism can be contrasted to Harold Rosenberg's contemporaneous reflections on "de-aestheticisation." Rosenberg's position was more nuanced than Greenberg's. Directly stimulated by Morris' example—his reflections started out from a consideration the *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal*—Rosenberg situated de-aestheticisation as an explicit reaction to the "formalistic over-refinement of the art of the sixties," noting that: "Ultimately, the repudiation of the aesthetic suggests the total elimination of the art object and its replacement by an idea for a work or by the rumour that one has been consummated—as in conceptual art."²²

Although Rosenberg was more careful in his conceptualisation of materiality, his account of de-aestheticisation thus had much in common with Lippard and Chandler's contemporaneous discussion of the putative "dematerialization" of art: "Despite the stress on the actuality of the materials used, the principle common to all classes of de-aestheticized art is that the finished product, if any, is of less significance than the procedures that brought the work into being and of which it is the trace."²³ Rosenberg however, in contrast to Lippard and Chandler, anticipated the failed negation of the aesthetic character of art that would eventually contribute to the "failure" of conceptual art: "Yet aesthetic qualities inhere in things whether or not they are works of art. The aesthetic is not an element that exists separately, to be banished at the will of the artists"²⁴ In this sense, Rosenberg recognised that art and the aesthetic overlapped, but was

insistent, contra Greenberg, that they did not necessarily coincide: “the program of de-aestheticization has been of practical use in the art of the past few years in that it has promoted... a salutary disregard for prevailing aesthetic dogmas.”²⁵

We are not concerned with Greenberg’s “Counter Avant-Garde” as persuasive criticism but rather as a symptomatic period piece. Greenberg could not accept the possibility of an art constituted by aesthetic withdrawal (or, perhaps better, de-emphasis) and as a result was obliged to stress a distinction between art’s dependence on either an “esthetic” or “non-esthetic” context (with the Readymade as the historical model for the latter): “All art depends in one way or another on context, but there’s a great difference between an aesthetic and a non-aesthetic context.”²⁶ Yet Greenberg was also forced to discriminate a third category:

There are, however, other varieties of avant-gardist art that do not rely on extrinsic context, and which do aim at intrinsic visual or situational originality: Minimal art (which is not altogether avant-gardist), technological, “funky,” earth, “process,” “systems,” etc., etc. These kinds of art more emphatically pose the question of why phenomenal novelty, and especially spectacular phenomenal novelty, seems to work nowadays so differently from the way it used to.²⁷

These were the problematic “varieties of avant-gardist” art that Greenberg could not classify other than as “sub-art” because they produced only “phenomenal,” but not aesthetic, “novelty.”²⁸ Of most significance for our argument, Greenberg’s third category listed out the range and diversity of practices that were then challenging the hegemony of his own formalist modernism. It is important to note the inclusion of tech art (“technological”) and to observe that “minimal art” is distinguished from “systems” art which is listed as a distinct

category. Greenberg's list constitutes a useful role call of the tendencies that were to matter in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Conceptual art emerged from, and positioned itself in relation to, the full range of practices cited here by Greenberg (as well as pop, which he mentions earlier in "Counter Avant-Garde", and a contemporary kinetic avant-garde which he does not). Greenberg seemed to recognise as much. The critic concluded his essay by running together all of the "varieties of avant-gardist art" in his awkward third category under the title of an emergent "Conceptualist" art: "It's as though Conceptualist art *in all its varieties* were making a last desperate attempt to escape from the jurisdiction of taste by plumbing remoter and remoter depths of sub-art—as though taste might not be able to follow that far down. And also as though boredom did not constitute an aesthetic judgment."²⁹

Greenberg's struggle to account for "conceptualist" practice was not a problem unique to the fading hegemon. Most established critics were also failing to articulate a persuasive account of the new art. Max Kozloff analysed the reasons for the pervasive critical malaise of the period: "Modern art has traditionally obscured the distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, but rarely so systematically as now has it blurred the categories of good and bad, the indifferent and the committed. Even the affectivity of pleasure and pain, once such reliable cues to meaning, can... be anesthetized to insignificance."³⁰ Consequently, the artistic situation of the late 1960s came to be characterised, for lack of a more persuasive theoretical paradigm, as subsisting in a "postformal" condition. Much like the postmodernism that would eventually succeed it

terminologically, the category was formulated as the abstract negation of that which it was held to supplant, rather than being defined by determinate terms. Given the not insignificant theoretical challenge of unifying “postformalism” as a category most critics simply stuck to the description of local tendencies or incipient “movements” rather than venturing any more far-reaching assessment. Greenberg’s confident ability to totalise “advanced art” appeared to be a thing of the past.

Though Marcuse also struggled to give an account of the advanced art of the 1960s and 70s, remarking on its uncertain character and form, he did insist on the requirement that art theory consider the relation between (anti-) aesthetics and politics. Such considerations were lacking from, or even suppressed in, Greenberg’s work. Marcuse more accurately described what Greenberg identified as “Conceptualist” art’s experiment with “sub-art” as an experiment in *anti-art* inspired by the recovery of the strategies of the historical avant-gardes: “The radical character, the violence... in contemporary art seems to indicate that it does not rebel against one style or another but against “style” itself, against the art-form of art, against the traditional “meaning” of art. The great artistic rebellion in the period of the first World War gives the signal.”³¹

Any substantive account of anti-art recognises that art’s challenge to the legitimacy of the aesthetic order also challenges the legitimacy of the political order. Greenberg had to produce the contorted category of “sub-art” in order to avoid acknowledging the political challenge represented by “Conceptualist” anti-art. However, the political challenge of postformalist art became unambiguous

only once “Conceptualist” art had exited minimalism (with its affinity to industrial production), for a fully systematic conceptual art (which sought to challenge art’s incorporation by capitalist production) via a transitional systems art (which self-consciously reflected on art’s systemic entanglement with capitalist production). Greenberg’s turn away from his early pre-War Marxism and towards a Cold War era liberalism necessarily affected his account of the character of the avant-garde. While Greenberg had insisted on the politically compromised character of a (bohemian) avant-garde tied to the bourgeoisie via an “umbilical cord of gold” in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939) he nevertheless concluded this essay with a claim for the political function of the avant-garde (albeit a paradoxically conservative one): “Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture... Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.”³² In contrast, by the time he wrote “Looking for the Avant-Garde” (1977) Greenberg’s account had morphed into a straight equation of the avant-garde with the advanced culture of the ruling class (albeit with the “Marxist” caveat that one might legitimately disapprove of such a situation).

Here then the avant-garde’s “only *raison d’être*” was considered to be its “insistence on aesthetic quality, aesthetic value” since “when it stops harping on quality, the avant-garde becomes something other than itself.”³³ This then was an account of avant-garde art entirely divested of its critical, anti-art character and, concomitantly, its revolutionary politics. For Greenberg artistic modernism and industrial modernity marched in lockstep. Caroline Jones summarises Greenberg’s position, explicitly contrasting it to the Frankfurt School’s:

For Greenberg bourgeois enlightenment came to be a good thing; Benjamin and his interlocutors in the Frankfurt School were much less sure, having witnessed its bankruptcy at the source. Similarly, for Greenberg positivism could be deployed as a seamless continuation of the Enlightenment, while among Benjamin's surviving colleagues (Horkheimer and Adorno), the instrumentation of Enlightenment rationalism through positivism became the focus of their critique.³⁴

Perplexingly, Jones makes no mention of Marcuse in her reference to the critique generated by Benjamin's "surviving colleagues," omitting any reference to him from her otherwise meticulously researched text. In this sense she misses the alternative modernism that was in play in New York in the 1960s, deferring to the received history of twentieth century American art which asserts that a theoretical alternative to Greenberg's authority was only seriously developed in the "critical" postmodernism of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Given the breakdown of hegemonic, formalist modernist, art critical authority in the late 1960s a new breed of artist/theorist sought to remedy the cultural lack, in the process challenging the necessity of the critic as a middleman. Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Joseph Kosuth, Daniel Buren, Adrian Piper and others all made substantive contributions to an emergent genre of artist-led criticism. Here however the less-discussed artist/theorist Jack Burnham proves of greatest importance because he attempted a theory of postformalist or "conceptualist" art as a whole, albeit with ambiguous results. Burnham is perhaps better designated a theorist/artist since, despite modest initial success, his artistic career did not take off and he came to focus exclusively on criticism and teaching. However, Burnham formed an early and close association with Hans Haacke whose practice became influential for

Burnham's theoretical reflections (acting almost as a surrogate for his own abandoned work). Burnham's theory also influenced the development of Haacke's practice. Consequently, if only at an early stage of their respective careers, Burnham and Haacke's work can be considered as closely related.

Burnham's theory of "systems aesthetics" aimed to totalise the artistic field of postformalism, bounding the "Conceptualist" artistic tendencies Greenberg could not account for ("Minimal art, technological, 'funky,' earth, 'process'... etc."). Consequently, systems aesthetics should be understood as a speculative replacement for Greenberg's formalist aesthetics. Thierry De Duve has recognised as much, explicitly contrasting Greenberg's resistance to a post-aesthetic "art at large" with Jack Burnham's enthusiasm for the dissolution of artistic boundaries. De Duve, however, caricatures Burnham as a pot-smoking "utopianist of art's dissolution into life" unintentionally producing the rhetorical effect of reinforcing the reactionary tenor of his own Greenberg-inspired neo-Kantianism.³⁵

This is not, however, to suggest that Burnham's theory of system aesthetics should be uncritically adopted. There have been good reasons for its relative obscurity and these must be acknowledged. De Duve's accusation of "utopianism" is not without some critical purchase: the Marcusean motifs in Burnham's thought emerged from an engagement with Marcuse's early thought, before Marcuse's disavowal of his utopianism. More significantly, Burnham left the precise status of the "aesthetic" within his theory under specified. Furthermore, Burnham failed to recognise the critical *priority* of (an incipient)

systematic conceptual art from amongst the competing postformalist tendencies. Conceptual art (understood as emerging through “systems” art) had critical priority amidst the competing postformalisms because it changed the function and the ontology of art in a way that other postformalist practices did not. Ultimately then, Burnham, like Greenberg, flattened out the distinctive features of different “Conceptualist” tendencies. Before assessing Burnham’s theory of systems aesthetics in relation to Marcusean critical theory, a task which will be undertaken in chapter three, we need to give an account of how the “system” entered art practice, and thereby art theory, as a critical object. It did so largely as a device used by minimal, pop and tech art to oppose Greenberg’s claims that “advanced art” was obliged to remain aesthetic.

Postformalisms

A wide range of artistic precedents for, and influences on, conceptual art have been regularly cited in the existing scholarship, including Duchamp's assisted and unassisted readymades, Yves Klein's investigations into the "immaterial," John Cage's aleatoric compositional method, Fluxus instruction and performance work, Henry Flynt's "concept art," Robert Morris' meta-artistic works, principally the *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal*, as well as *Card File* (1962) [Fig. 6] and *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* (1961). However, it is three of the contemporary "conceptualist" tendencies identified by Greenberg—pop, minimalism and tech art—and one that he conspicuously overlooked (but which was closely related to tech art)—the international kinetic avant-garde—that concern our alternative systems genealogy of conceptual art. All four share an explicit reaction against the generation of modernist painters immediately preceding them and a relation to the historical recovery of constructivism which occurred in the 1960s as a consequence of art's attempt to resist assimilation to the productive forces of technocratic, advanced industrial capitalism. As Jeff Wall has insisted:

The Minimalist and the Pop artists based themselves on a repudiation of the extravagant inwardness of the Forties generation. Both groups stressed the impingement of the division of labour upon the image of the unified and organic artistic process taken over by Abstract Expressionism from its European sources. Both were "Constructivist" in this regard, and therefore implicitly re-opened an artistic argument which characterized the early decades of this century.³⁶

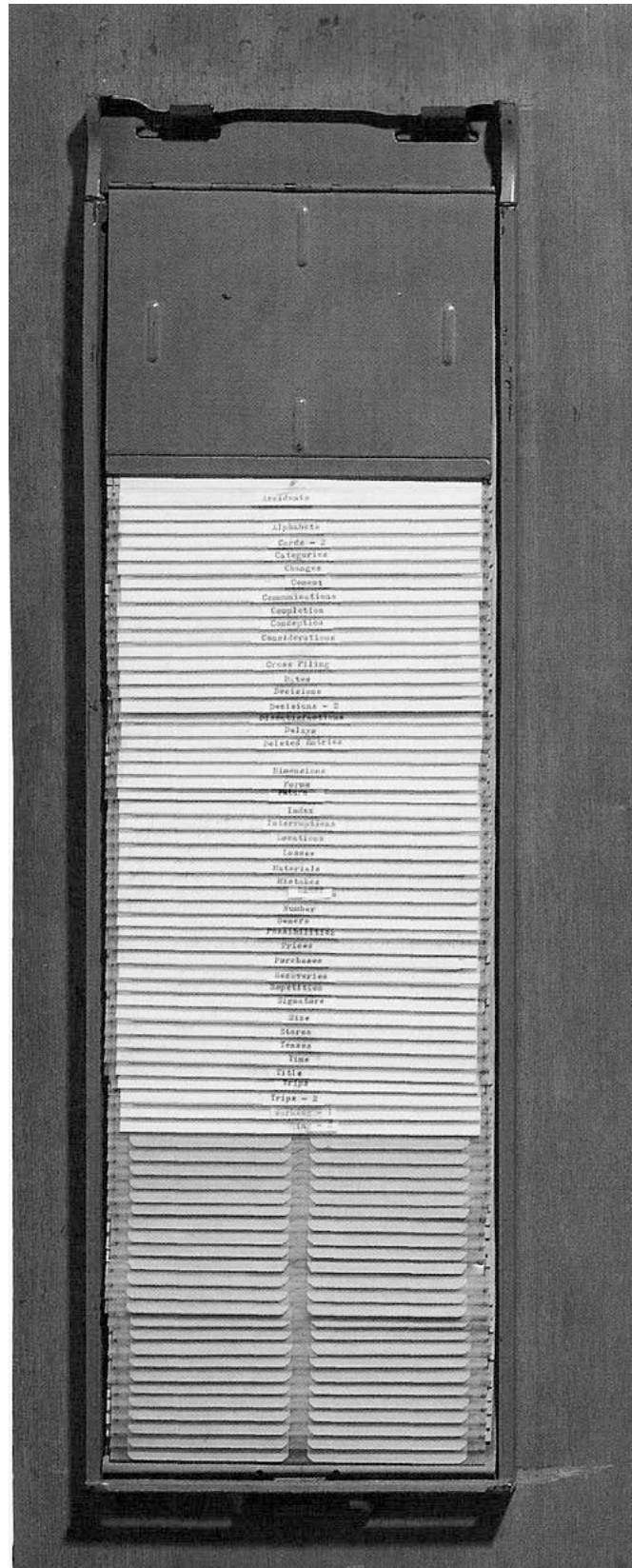


Fig.6. Robert Morris, *Card File* (1962).

Here we can expand Wall's genealogy by adding tech and kinetic art to his claims about minimalism and pop. All of these tendencies shared the "repudiation of the extravagant inwardness of the Forties generation" and minimalism, tech and kinetic art demonstrated this through a re-deployment of constructivist motifs.³⁷ Less directly, they shared an engagement with theoretical antihumanism, largely mediated through artists' interest in the achievements of the nouveau roman.³⁸ Antihumanism manifested itself in the art world as a reaction against Abstract Expressionism, *art informel*, and the model of expressive human agency that underlay both of these traditions. By using systematic compositional procedures artists sought to repudiate the aestheticism and humanism of the preceding generation. These tendencies resulted in the development of an explicit "systems art," as recorded by Greenberg in "Counter Avant Garde."

If Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt and Frank Stella are widely acknowledged as the artists who decisively challenged the dominance of Abstract Expressionism in the US, then Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein and François Morellet fulfilled a similar role with respect to the overthrow of *art informel* in Europe. This process happened on both sides of the Atlantic within a broadly concurrent timeframe and the developments were broadly accepted as parallel. It was however with the emerging generation of American minimalists that questions of originality and influence became more fraught. The minimalists, though they acknowledged a shared genealogical root in constructivism, strongly insisted that their work be distinguished from European Geometric Abstraction because of the latter's perceived commitment to the *compositional* relationship of component

parts (an objection that had in fact already been formulated by the New York School).

Yet it is far from clear that this sweeping characterisation of the European art of the period was accurate. Certainly, as suggested earlier, François Morellet was a clear exception. From 1952, influenced by encountering Max Bill's work in 1951 in Brazil, Morellet started using a systematic method to organise his painting in a way that could be considered both non-compositional and proto-conceptual, at least in the sense that "conceptual" would be articulated by Sol LeWitt (namely using the idea as a "machine" with which to make the work).³⁹ Morellet's association with Julio Le Parc, Horacio Garcia Rossi, Francesco Sobrino, Jean-Pierre Yvaral and Joël Stein under the banner of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) influenced his work in this respect.⁴⁰ As Le Parc has retrospectively outlined GRAV's concerns: "Find a unitary system to rule the surface, the forms and their relation to the plan, depending on a set program... We forbid ourselves to interfere "artistically" and break the homogeneity of the outcomes, once the system had been mechanically thrown on the surface."⁴¹

Morellet and LeWitt were to come into conflict in 1973 when a German gallery took out an advert in *Flash Art* accusing LeWitt of plagiarising Morellet's work, including side-by-side illustrations of the works in question as "proof." The accusation was ill-founded, neglecting to put forward any evidence of plagiarism beyond the apparent formal similarities of the work. Yet although the artist defended himself by insisting his work had been taken out of context, LeWitt nevertheless stopped making similar works.⁴² Clearly there was enough in the

claim to spur LeWitt towards a more differentiated articulation of his own concerns. The young Haacke, however, did “plagiarise” Morellet and yet his work is no less important for that. Haacke quite consciously worked through and beyond Morellet’s systematic method in the course of his artistic development, renouncing painting on the back of Morellet’s example even as Morellet continued to paint.

Haacke’s work was also impacted by another artists’ collective, the Zero Group. Comprising three principal members, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker (all based in Düsseldorf), the core members also had looser connections with other German artists and with associated groups in France, Holland, Italy and Yugoslavia. Benjamin Buchloh has remarked on Haacke’s association with Zero, treating it as an unfavourable influence.⁴³ For Buchloh, the Zero group operated “along an axis between the mystification of technology and the project of a scientific enlightenment freed from the suspicion of political ideologies” which constituted “the perfect disguise of historical amnesia.”⁴⁴ Yet this assertion runs contrary to how the group articulated its own concerns. Revisiting their statements, it is hard to share Buchloh’s conviction. Operating in the context of German post-war reconstruction, Piene remarked: “Our suspicion of the soulless efficiency and shabby neatness... was fundamental. We despised the encompassing Christian materialism and saw in it a Western version of the Socialist materialism of the Marxist world, or as American materialism in miniature.”⁴⁵ The group also reacted against the previous generation’s artistic response to these social conditions: “We angrily resented

the sentimental pessimistic humanism which occupied literature and the fine arts in the Fifties, when misery was a fashionable convention.”⁴⁶

Instead, rejecting both economic development and the intellectual consolation of despair, Piene recognised that the group was forced to adopt an “absurd” position of optimism, a “positive attitude” whereby they sought to “change things from bad to good, darkness to light, decay to life, ugliness to beauty, stagnation to movement, illustration to pulsation, intellect to integration, drama to sensibility, obscurity to purity, naturalism to nature, individualism to responsibility, nationalism to internationalism, internationalism to universalism... observer to actor, onlooker to engagé.”⁴⁷ This ambitious trajectory—from “onlooker to engagé”—might be accused of a naïve utopianism then, perhaps even a perverse affirmativeness, but cannot accurately be judged historically amnesiac or as simplistically “freed from the suspicion of political ideologies.”

Rather, Zero should be positioned within the broader sweep of theoretical antihumanism then current. Two Zero-influenced pieces by Haacke (both made from polished stainless steel and transparent acrylic), directly evidence this intellectual cross-fertilisation. Both *La Bataille de Reichenfels* (1961) and *Les Couloirs de Marienbad* (1962) [Fig.7] refer to Alain Robbe-Grillet’s writing. These two works by Haacke are distinctive in that they enact Haacke’s definitive transition from the two-dimensional space of painting (still associated with manual realisation), via the liminal category of the relief, into three-dimensional work, with the minimal “look” of industrial manufacture. Similarly, GRAV’s

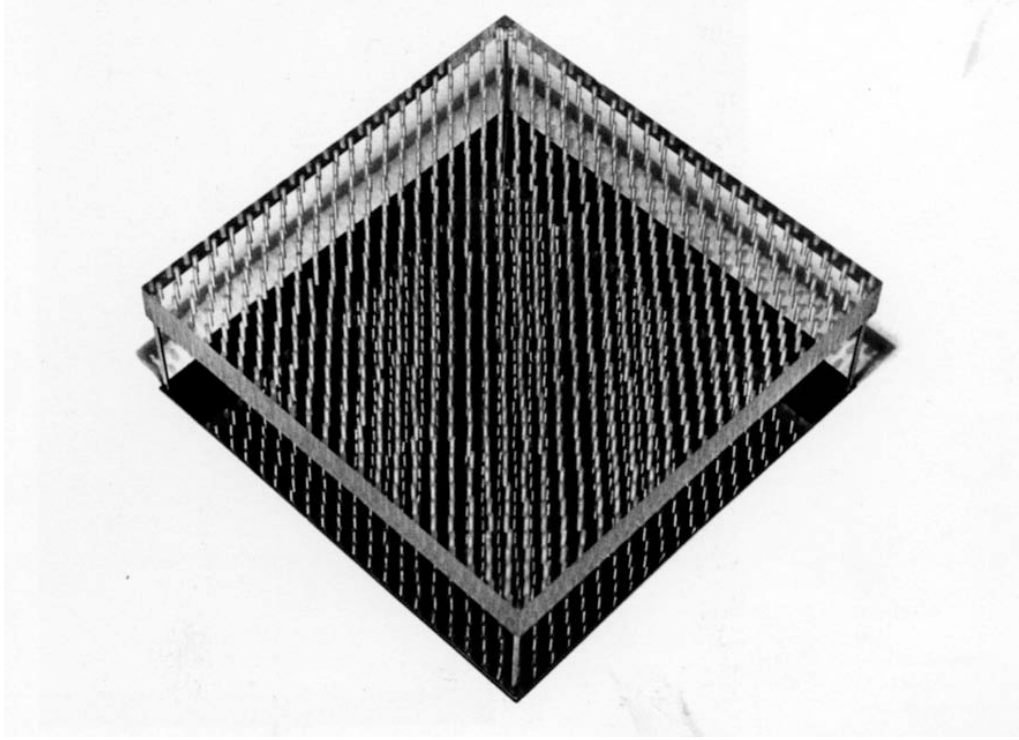


Fig.7. Hans Haacke, *Les Couloirs de Marienbad* (1962).

anti-gestural systems work, described by Le Parc as “getting rid of the marks of manual realisation (the ‘coup de pinceau’ of the master)” and Zero’s use of contemporary materials, purged of conventional art historical connotation, should be understood as part of the same broad tendency. Both move away from the individual expressive agency of a unified organic subject conceived as the producer of a recognisably handcrafted art object. This then was a shared problem for art after Abstract Expressionism. Furthermore, the essential continuity of these European concerns with those of the American minimalists should be noted, even as it is acknowledged that the manner in which these concerns were addressed must be distinguished.

GRAV and Zero were linked to a wider international avant-garde via their association with kinetic art. As the art critic George Jappe observed: “kineticism was not seen as a programme in itself, but as one means among many in the struggle to cast off *art informel*, subjective, aesthetically neutral abstract painting.”⁴⁸ Though both groups produced much work that was not kinetic (as has been discussed), the motives underlying kineticism united their approach. These motives, and their relation to contemporary social developments, were well captured by Willoughby Sharp (the principle American advocate of kinetic art):

The new age, the electric age, has created an environment which has reconfigured our senses... This radically alters our aesthetic needs. Today painting and static sculpture are no longer wholly satisfying. We need an art of greater energy. We need an art of total environment. We need an art that unites us with the real rhythms of our era. The art of light and movement is dynamic, environmental, and inclusive. It involves all of our senses. This is only one feature that separates it from older art. The old art saw time as lineal. The new art sees time as configurational. The old art depicted space as uniform and enclosed. The new art perceives space as organic and open. *The old art was an object, the new art is a system.*⁴⁹

Here then was an explicit statement about the post-object, systems-based concerns taken up by the new age's new art. As Pamela Lee has observed "it [is] difficult to imagine the excitement that greeted kinetic work in the postwar era; how radical this work was considered by many; and its currency as a Sixties phenomenon as new, as fashionable, and as experimental as any other form of popular culture."⁵⁰ In kinetic art the artwork was conceived as a dynamic system rather than a fixed object, one, crucially, in contact with its environmental context and viewing public.⁵¹

Related to, and often overlapping with, kinetic art was the tech art or Art & Technology movement. As Gustav Metzger succinctly put it: "Technological art is kinetic art plus a lot of money."⁵² Running parallel to what is generally understood as postformalist art today; tech art explicitly advocated the fusion of advanced art and advanced technology.⁵³ Again, Metzger summarised appositely "Kinetic art failed to keep in step with an unprecedented technology that went through fundamental transformations every ten years or so. The equation of art media with present—and future—industrial and research techniques is the aim of technological art."⁵⁴ Major universities were engaged in supporting art and technology based practice, Gyorgy Kepes CAVS centre at MIT is perhaps the best known of these and Jack Burnham spent a year with Kepes on a fellowship, developing his own luminist practice.⁵⁵ In tech art then artists attempted to enhance the post-object, systematic forms of kinetic art by "upgrading" them to the most advanced postindustrial technologies. Tech art rewired kinetic art.

As such, tech art now looks both misguidedly teleological and suspiciously affirmative. Yet, in moving away from the traditional mediums, as well as away from received notions of aesthetic “quality,” tech art still conceived itself in opposition to conventional, formalist modernism. In the late 1960s, tech art enjoyed as much visibility as other postformalist practices.⁵⁶ Due to its high production costs and emphasis on cross-disciplinary collaboration, tech art tended to be produced by groups. Robert Rauschenberg and Billy Klüwer’s Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) initiative, responsible for the seminal “Nine Evenings” show in 1966, is probably the best known of these groups today.⁵⁷ In the 1960s, however, other groups such as USCO (an American kinetic/light art group) and Palsa (a group focusing on computer-controlled light environments) were also prominent. Furthermore there were also attempts in both the UK and the US to place artists directly into industrial roles. John Latham’s Artist’s Placement Group formed an important model here, one echoed in the US by schemes initiated by EAT as well as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s “Art and Technology” program.⁵⁸

Several artists who would come to be associated with conceptual art were involved in some way with the tech art movement. Mel Bochner undertook three EAT residencies, including one with the Singer Corporation where he first began work on what would become his celebrated *Measurement* series. Haacke proposed several works to Maurice Tuchman’s Art & Technology project at LACMA (even though all were ultimately refused). Robert Smithson rendered “consultation and advice as an ‘artist consultant’ to Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (Engineers and Architects)” on their “development of an

air terminal between Fort Worth and Dallas.”⁵⁹ The early history of Art & Language also involved technological experimentation as Charles Harrison has noted: “Bainbridge and Hurrell’s joint ‘Hardware’ show at the Architectural Association, London, in Spring 1967, contained devices with mechanical functions which were employed as ‘analogical source material’ for consideration of art functions.”⁶⁰ Indeed, one way that the development of conceptual art has been read is as a transition from a “hardware” to a “software” based art practice. This was the premise of Burnham’s “Software, Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art” exhibition at the Jewish Museum in 1970 and, albeit less explicitly, Kynaston McShine’s “Information” exhibition at MoMA in 1969. Although the analogy is reductive it perhaps offers more than Lippard and Chandler’s claims about the dematerialization of art since software always relies on hardware to function.⁶¹

Though the utopian technological hopes of the early 1960s, and the tech art which emerged in concert with them, came to look naïve at best, particularly given the subsequent counter-cultural reaction against a burgeoning technocracy, it is important to mark just how pronounced the Art and Technology movement of the early Sixties was, and how many of the most important artists of that decade were involved in one way or another with its postformalist experiments. Tech art stands as the high water mark in the attempt to directly relate advanced artistic and advanced industrial production. In the process it insisted on the requirement that the condition of producing an autonomous art after formalist modernism would involve working within the social relations of technological mediation.

In a related sense, the character of pop was in no small part linked to its technological enthusiasms. Pop, from its earliest incarnation in the activities of the Independent Group, troped the productive means of consumer culture as well as its products. Jeff Wall has stressed the “aggressively mechanistic and anti-expressive” qualities of pop art (which, for Wall, it shares with minimalism).⁶² Yet pop can be distinguished from minimal and tech art both by the ironic manner of its technological appropriation, and the restricted scope of its technological enthusiasms (pop predominantly addressed consumer technology). Furthermore, pop tended to treat its engagement with such technology in an emblematic way (Lichtenstein paints his Benday dots, Warhol has his cardboard boxes manually silk-screened) whereas tech art, in contrast, was concerned with the direct use of esoteric new technologies.⁶³

It was, however, in minimalism that the systematic logic of advanced industrial production was most directly thematised. If Lawrence Alloway’s “Primary Structures” (1966) is now regarded as the seminal minimalist exhibition then his less-discussed companion show, “Systemic Painting” (1966), more explicitly suggests minimalism’s links with other systems-derived postformalist practices of the 1960s. Systemic painting, derived from Stella’s example, rationalized painterly gesture to a series of pre-planned procedures, stressing the materiality of the painted canvas rather than the subjective intentions of its producer.⁶⁴

Beyond Specific Objects

For a certain critical tradition, minimalism stands as a “crux,” the decisive post-war practice through which subsequent developments should be understood. As Hal Foster elaborates it, minimal art determines the trajectory of art from the 1960s to the present: “In this genealogy minimalism will figure not as a distant dead end but as a contemporary crux, a paradigm shift toward postmodernist practices that continue to be elaborated today. Finally this genealogy will lead back to the 1960s, that is, to the place of minimalism in this critical conjuncture of post-war culture, politics, and economics.”⁶⁵ Though a younger generation of critics in this same tradition has sought to enrich Foster’s account of the “genealogy of art from the 1960s to the present” by offering a more nuanced account of minimalism’s own genealogy, in these accounts the purported centrality of minimalism to post 60s artistic practice is implicitly confirmed rather than challenged.⁶⁶ Here, minimalism is accepted as that practice which enacts a “paradigm shift” from modernism and “toward postmodernist practices.”

Peter Osborne, noting the restricted definition of modernism (as Greenbergian formalism) that such an account depends on, has commented critically on it, noting that: “The problem with this periodization... is that it fails to endow the complexly interacting set of anti-‘modernist’ artistic strategies of the 1960s with either sufficient conceptual determinacy and distinctness or adequate historical effectivity.”⁶⁷ In effect, minimal art is mis-totalised, produced as both internally coherent and as *the* movement that overturns Greenberg. Yet, as we have already seen, a *varied* set of postformalist practices understood themselves to be

undertaking the same task as minimal art. Osborne goes on to note the effect of this over hasty generalisation: “it fails to register both the *critical* priority of conceptual art within this field and the historical and critical significance of its ‘post-conceptual’ legacy. It thus fails to provide a theoretical basis on which we might specify the ontological distinctiveness of contemporary art.”⁶⁸

It can be argued that systems art serves to connect “the complexly interacting set of anti-‘modernist’ artistic strategies of the 1960s.” At the least, systems art exists both *between* and as *part of* “minimal” and “tech” and “conceptual” art “movements.” Seth Siegelaub has observed that:

You could say that a lot of avant-gardisms have been directed at their immediate predecessors and have developed in relation to, antithesis or contravention of them. Here was something which didn’t have that quality, it dealt with something else. I suppose in terms of generations, the people who came immediately before would be Carl Andre and, as a borderline case, Sol LeWitt: minimal sculptors anyway. Conceptualism wasn’t developed in opposition to that, and, in fact, there are a lot of people who fall just on the line between the two.⁶⁹

What Siegelaub names as falling “just on the line between” minimalism and conceptual art was systems art. This awkward incongruity perhaps accounts for its near invisibility within the existing historiography of Sixties art. Yet its taxonomic irregularity is precisely its virtue. The “awkwardness” of systems art as a category lies in failing to conform to that intellectual scheme whereby visual resemblance and historical and geographical proximity are viewed as valid criteria by which to locate individual practices within a defined “movement.” “Movements” are the extant legacy of formalist art criticism. As Siegelaub notes: “I think all art movements are fictions... They are promotional and, ultimately, economic devices.”⁷⁰ “Movements” are precisely what conceptual art challenged

as adequate to any account of art. The diverse practices that constitute a contemporary, post-conceptual art must be considered and grouped by means of their conceptual relations, not via morphological similarity, nor temporal or geographical proximity.

It is useful therefore to reconsider the construction of minimalism as a purportedly coherent “movement.” A single issue of *Artforum*, the Summer 1967 special issue on American sculpture, saw the publication of three seminal essays in this debate: Robert Morris’ “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3;” Michael Fried’s “Art and Objecthood;” and Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art.” We can characterise these three essays as representing the dominant (Morris, minimalism), residual (Fried, Formalism) and emergent (Le Witt, “Conceptualism”) positions and practices of the (Anglophone) art world in the late 1960s.⁷¹ As such, the Summer 1967 issue crystallizes a set of forces held in tension and about to shift in relation.

Michael Fried’s “Art and Objecthood” is renowned for its attempt to secure a post-Greenbergian formalism through its dual-pronged attack on the “objecthood” and “theatricality” of minimalist, or, as Fried preferred, “Literalist” art. Fried totalised a discrete set of practices under a single position, “Literalism,” and asserted that this work had value only in so far as “it is in relation to modernist painting and modernist sculpture that literalist art defines or locates the position it aspires to occupy.”⁷² Yet the beginning of Fried’s essay implicitly acknowledged a challenge to his own subsequent pronouncements, in that it demonstrated precisely the *variation* confronting his attempt at totalisation: “The

enterprise known variously as Minimal Art, ABC Art, Primary Structures, and Specific Objects is largely ideological.”⁷³

Given the fact that all art is both ideological and ideologically determined, Fried’s suggestion that minimal art’s “ideological” nature “distinguishes it from modernist painting and sculpture” sounds an unconvincing note. Though we may object to Fried’s confident totalisation, it is not the attempt, but rather the manner, of his synthesis that is in question here. All historical or critical accounts are obliged to frame their empirical objects with conceptual schema, yet it is imperative that this be done with due care and consideration, acknowledging the limitations inherent to any given approach as well as its strengths. Though we might broadly agree that minimal art in its Juddian “specific object” formulation was too closely tied to the simple negation of Greenbergian formalism, it is the fact that Fried runs together Judd’s work and minimalism that is problematic.⁷⁴ Most objectionable here is Fried’s conflation of Judd and Morris’s positions. For while Fried spelt out the differences between the two artists (“Judd... seems to think of what he calls Specific Objects as something other than sculpture, while Robert Morris conceives of his own unmistakably literalist work as resuming the lapsed tradition of Constructivist sculpture...”) he proceeded to conflate them anyway: “But this and other disagreements are less important than the views Judd and Morris hold in common.”⁷⁵ Fried’s attack on minimal art depends on constructing a “Literalist” position by privileging Judd’s theoretical pronouncements while downplaying or wilfully misreading Morris’.

Simply flicking through a few pages of the same magazine in which “Art and Objecthood” first appeared upsets Fried’s conflation of Judd and Morris’ position. Already in “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3” Morris was taking his distance from the interest in “specific objects” which preoccupied Judd.⁷⁶ With the benefit of hindsight it is predictable enough that this should have been the case, given Morris’ subtitle for “Notes on Sculpture, Part 4,” namely, “beyond objects.” It is, however, the specific character of Morris’ post-object trajectory that is of interest, for it serves to differentiate his dominant (but waning) position from the emergent conceptual focus of LeWitt. Morris put a paragraph on “structures” alongside one on “objects” in “Notes, part 3,” observing that: “Sets, series, modules, permutations, or other simple systems are often made use of. Such work often transcends its didacticism to become rigorous. Sometimes there is a puritanical skepticism of the physical in it. The lesser work is often stark and austere, rationalistic and insecure.”⁷⁷ Though Morris was nothing if not cautious in his enthusiasm for the work made from the “simple systems” he discusses here, his statement can be instructively compared to an earlier one, from “Notes, part 2:”

One of the worst and most pretentious... situations in some of the new work is the scientific element that shows up generally in the application of mathematical or engineering concerns to generate or inflect images. This may have worked brilliantly for Jasper Johns (and he is the prototype for this kind of thinking) in his number and alphabet paintings, in which the exhaustion of a logical system closes out and ends the image and produces the picture. But appeals to binary mathematics, tensegrity techniques, mathematically derived modules, progressions, etc., within a work are only another application of the Cubist esthetic of having reasonableness or logic for the relative parts.⁷⁸

In contrast to these remarks, by the time Morris wrote “Notes, part 3” he was coming to recognise the force of some of the new work, albeit only that which, for him, transcended its “didacticism.” Though Morris’ post-minimal trajectory was in the direction of process and Anti-Form work, this shift in his public

position (from “Notes, part 2” to “Notes, part 3”) with regard to the emergent systems-based, conceptual work was significant.⁷⁹ Though he did not subscribe to its direction of investigation, Morris was obliged to recognise its claim to significance. Here we sense Morris carefully positioning himself in relation to a strong, competing artistic tendency.

It is hard to avoid relating Morris’ comments specifically to LeWitt’s work, all the more so since “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” sits in the same binding as Morris’ “Notes, part 3.” Morris’ charge of “puritanical skepticism of the physical” was effectively rebuffed by LeWitt’s assertion that: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”⁸⁰ Furthermore, Le Witt also dispatched any accusation of “scientism” with regard to his work: “Conceptual art doesn’t really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy or any other mental discipline. The mathematics used by most artists is simple arithmetic or simple number systems.”⁸¹ LeWitt had his own scepticism to manifest, specifically towards the benefits of the “physicality” of new materials:

New materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art. Some artists confuse new materials with new ideas. There is nothing worse than seeing art that wallows in gaudy baubles. By and large most artists who are attracted to these materials are the ones that lack the stringency of mind that would enable them to use the materials well. It takes a good artist to use new materials and make them into a work of art. The danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of expressionism).⁸²

The impression here is that Morris and LeWitt were covertly trading fire. While implicitly recognising the validity of each other's position, they simultaneously made the case for the superiority of their own approach, insisting on the ease with which the opposing tendency could result in artistic failure.

Predictably enough then, Morris had a response to LeWitt's challenge concerning the fetishisation of materials (the depth of the unplanned dialogue between the two articles is striking). Its ramifications go well beyond the implicit debate between the two competing artists however:

It is not in the uses of new, exotic materials that the present work differs much from past work... The difference lies in the kind of order that underlies the forming of this work. This order is not based on previous art orders, but is an order so basic to culture that its obviousness makes it nearly invisible. The new three-dimensional work has grasped the cultural infrastructure of forming itself that has been in use, and developing, since Neolithic times and *culminates in the technology of industrial production*.⁸³

Morris' embrace of industrial materials and processes stood in stark contrast to LeWitt's suspicion. Yet neither position is sufficiently dialectical. Morris was fascinated by the latest developments in art's relation to the "cultural infrastructure of forming" but did not speculate on the significance of these developments. Was sculpture infinitely expandable across any and all new materials or would it not at some point become necessary at some point to renounce a specifically *sculptural* project? LeWitt renounced the "gaudy baubles" of new industrially-manufactured materials yet, arguably, the logic of industrial production was even more deeply insinuated into his artistic project than Morris'.

Interestingly, Morris adumbrated a suggestive insight into these problems in a footnote to his concluding essay in the series, “Notes, part 4:” “An advanced, technological, urban environment is a totally manufactured one. Interaction with the environment tends more and more toward information processing in one form or another and away from interactions involving transformations of matter. The very means and visibility for material transformations become more remote and recondite.”⁸⁴ Morris’ comment suggested a dawning awareness of an environmental change, namely the development of an advanced industrial society out of an industrial one. Here Morris’ text revealed the influence of his dialogue with Jack Burnham: the two had worked closely together on a planned Earthwork at Northwestern University (Burnham’s then employer). Though the work was not realised due to a conflict with the University administration over the scale of the proposed work, Morris’ explicit reference to “information processing” would seem to suggest Burnham’s influence on his thinking at the time. Morris commented on his relationship to Burnham’s work in a letter to the critic: “Mainly I want to say that what you’ve reflected back to me about my work – your careful thought, insight, criticism – is deeply appreciated. And in general your thinking about art and where it’s headed is more meaningful than anyone else’s thought about art today.”⁸⁵

Both Morris’ and LeWitt’s practices ultimately remain enmeshed in the problematics that had attended art’s relation to industrial society. There has been much debate about whether minimalism constitutes an affirmation of industrial culture, and thereby of capitalism, or not.⁸⁶ What is not questioned by any of its proponents is that minimalism exhibits a clear relation to industrial culture.

Whether minimalism is complicit with industrial society or not, what quickly came to be a critical issue for art after minimalism was a self-consciousness about what relation art should take with advanced, or post-industrial culture. This proved to be a political at least as much as formal question. Or, better expressed, it was a question that would reveal the politics of form that had been so energetically repudiated in Greenberg and Fried's formalist modernism and even, arguably, by Judd who, while politically active, preferred to believe his art and his politics could and should be separated. Here Ian Burn and Karl Beveridge's scathing assessment of Judd's work precisely specified the problem:

The issue is fundamental and crucial – whether we might be able to express (at least) a negative relation to the modes of capitalist production, or whether we are forced to reproduce a positive relation to these modes. Your form of art represents a final stage in the reduction of art to a mode of capitalist production. When the object of our “creativity” becomes so objectified, “creativity” becomes a concept external to us, indeed alien to us, losing its dynamic as a personal-practical transformational force and instead seeming to have a “life of its own.” The work appears to make itself... Subjectivity becomes the enemy!¹⁸⁷

Several artists developed a practice that contested Judd's apparent equation of art with “Good Design,” that is, the uncomfortably close relation between the sleek industrial lines of a professionally fabricated art and the rationalized cultural products of the technocracy. Paul Thek, in *Rundfahrt* (1964) [Fig.8], the first work in his *Technological Reliquaries* (1964-67) series, graphically portrayed the limit case of a certain form of specific object minimalism, staging its exclusion of the corporeal. In a graphic return of the repressed, Thek inserted (fake) flesh into pristine Perspex cubes symbolising minimalism. Robert Smithson splintered the minimalist cube from within in *Four Sided Vortex* (1965). In *Accession II* (1967) [Fig.9] Eva Hesse laced the inside of a fabricated metal cube perforated with thirty thousand holes, tying a length of plastic tubing through each one. A tactile



Fig.8. Paul Thek, *Rundfahrt* (1964).

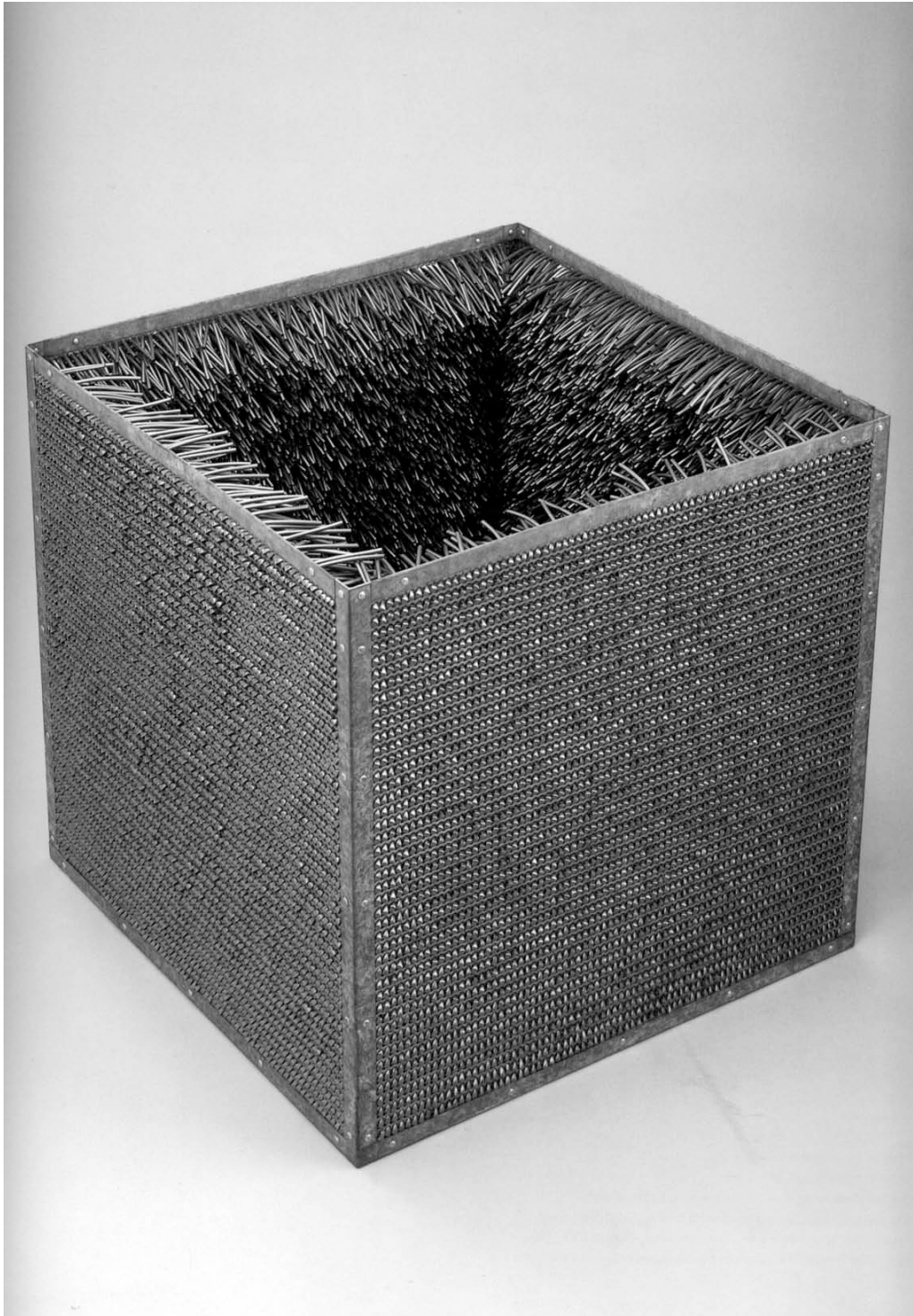


Fig.9. Eva Hesse, *Accession II* (1967).

interior surface was generated, uncannily disrupting the conventionally placid surfaces of the minimalist specific object.

But an alternate strategy to all of these critiques was found in a “systematic” approach that pushed the logic of the relation to the “cultural infrastructure of forming” still further. Bochner developed its terms but Haacke was to prove its most consistent exponent, noting: “In order to contribute to the gradual decomposition of the belief structure of today’s fantastically resilient capitalism, one cannot but mimic and play along with some of its ways. Only history will tell in retrospect who was co-opting whom, if one can really speak of co-optation in such a dialectically complex setting.”⁸⁸

From Series to Systems

Also published in the summer of 1967, but in *Arts Magazine*, Mel Bochner's article "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism" helps to contextualise, arbitrate and extend the claims and counter-claims put forward by Fried, Morris and LeWitt in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum*. Though his argument was left understated, or perhaps not fully developed, Bochner's essay implied a progression through its key terms (from serial art to systems to solipsism). We can elaborate the logic of Bochner's argument without fully subscribing to it (systems art avoided becoming solipsistic in ways that Bochner was not yet able to envisage, principally by Haacke's "opening" of the system to its external context but also in Bochner's own later *Measurement* series).

Bochner began by delimiting the scope of his observations ("certain art being done today"), strongly insisting on how it should be correctly interpreted ("this work cannot be discussed on either stylistic or metaphoric grounds").⁸⁹ Here he made a swift disavowal of Fried's project to resuscitate formalism as a viable artistic strategy (which at this stage was having to rely on asserting the questionable merits of Colour Field painting). Proceeding from a discussion of Carl Andre and Dan Flavin's work, Bochner argued for the emergence of an artistic *method* which could "only be termed systematic."⁹⁰ He observed that: "Systematic thinking has generally been considered the antithesis of artistic thinking. Systems are characterized by regularity, thoroughness, and repetition in execution. They are methodical. It is their consistency and the continuity of application that characterises them. Individual parts of a system are not in

themselves important but are relevant only in the way they are used in the enclosed logic of the whole series.”⁹¹

Bochner opposed “systematic thinking” to an “artistic thinking” that should be understood to comprise not only the expressive gesture and metaphysical freight of Abstract Expressionism (which had been disavowed by minimalism) but also the residual “artiness” of Morris’ anti-form and process based pieces, whose brute materiality was characterised by an interest in material forming alien to the concerns of a systematic methodology: “No stylistic or material qualities unite the artists using this approach because what form the work takes is unimportant.”⁹²

Moving through a brief gloss on solipsism understood as the rejection, rather than non-existence of mind-independent reality (and therefore as epistemological rather than ontological in character), Bochner discussed serial art that he considered to be “likewise self-contained and non-referential.” Serial art was then defined as a *separate* methodology in its own right: “Seriality is premised on the idea that the succession of terms (divisions) within a single work is based on a numerical or otherwise predetermined derivation (progression, permutation, rotation, reversal) from one or more of the preceding terms in that piece.”⁹³

Bochner explained his understanding of serial methodology in more detail in an *Artforum* article published later in 1967, “The Serial Attitude.” Here Bochner took significant pains to distinguish work that was produced “in series,” or work that was “modular” from that which could properly be called “serial.”⁹⁴ Both articles used LeWitt as an exemplar, stressing the artist’s importance for any

consideration of serial methodology. Expanding on his earlier definition, Bochner produced the following account of seriality:

1. The derivation of the terms or interior divisions of the work is by means of a numerical or otherwise systematically predetermined process (permutation, progression, rotation, reversal).
2. The order takes precedence over the execution.
3. The completed work is fundamentally parsimonious and systematically self exhausting.⁹⁵

From Bochner's two articles we have the identification of two distinct methodologies ("systematic" and "serial") that were both being deployed in the advanced art of the time. Yet Bochner made no observations as to how, or even if, these terms should be related (and he frequently ran them together). Serial methodology appeared to be the privileged term for Bochner (who drew parallels with serialism in music) but at the same time he acknowledged that a series was a simple system, which logically implied that serial methodology formed a subset of systematic methodology. For Bochner, writing in 1967, it was simply the case that the artists he discussed were using a methodology that might best be characterised as "serial."

This situation was about to change as artists began to make self-consciously *systematic* works. If we contrast Bochner's sole surviving "minimalist" work *One, Two, Three* (1966) [Fig.10] with another work produced that year *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* (1966), we note a marked difference in approach and a rapid development in the originality and sophistication of Bochner's own concerns. *One, Two, Three* seems heavily influenced by Judd. Although the piece explored simple serial permutation it remained within the scope of the specific object. In marked contrast *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* comprises a series of twelve

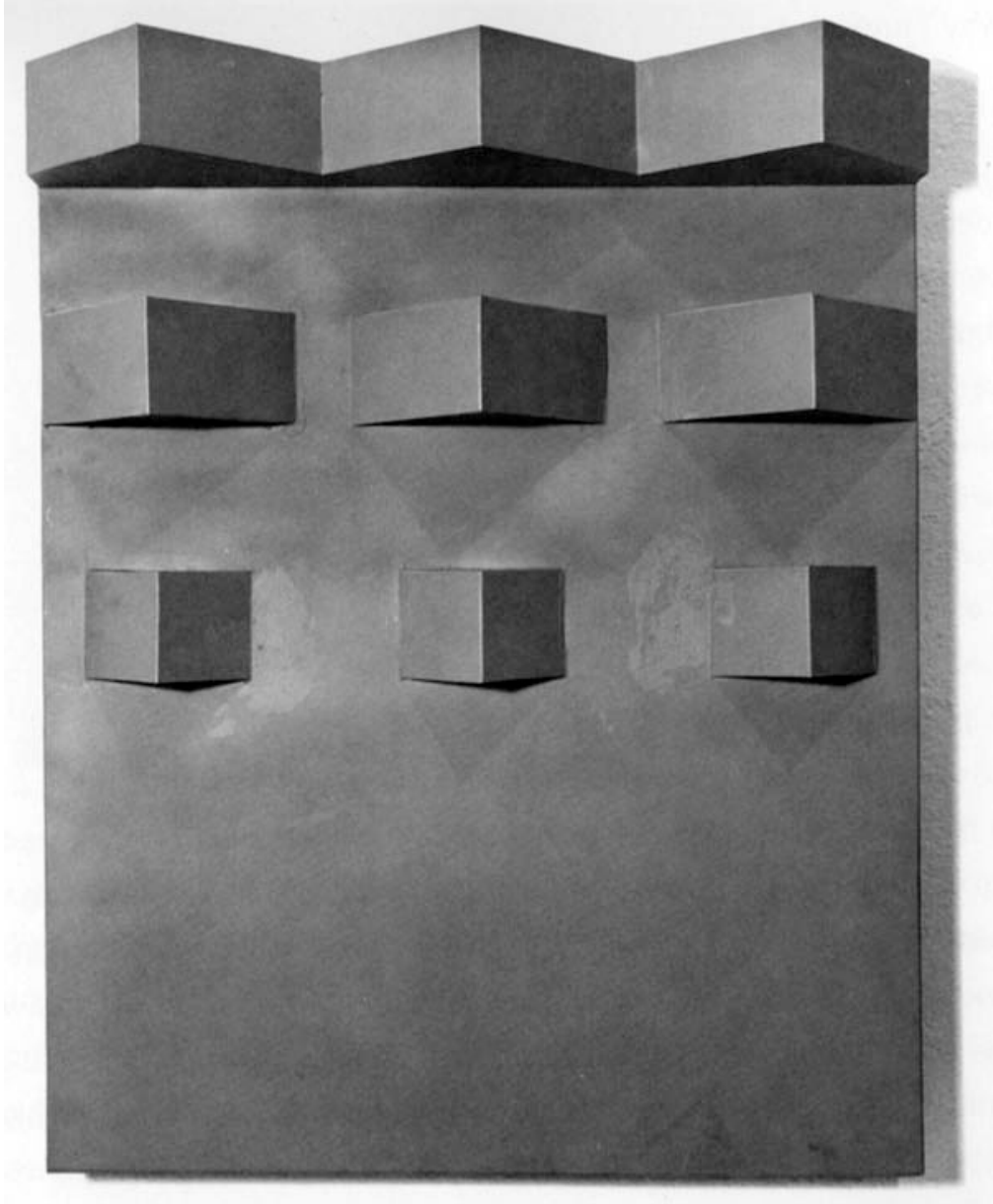


Fig.10. Mel Bochner, *One, Two, Three* (1966)

diagrams of six by six number grids filled with various instances of numeric progressions from one to four. Each grid is realised as a block “sculpture” (with the number one corresponding to one block, two to two, and so on). Each “sculpture” is also photographed in plan, section and elevation, producing the thirty-six photographs. Here then a simple system produces markedly different results. Such a stark contrast of approach is made more comprehensible by looking at Bochner’s various hand drawn studies for works derived from simple numerical progression. A work such as *Three-Way Fibonacci Progression* (1966) [Fig. 11] comprises a series of permuted sculptural forms in series, each derived from the preceding form by way of a Fibonacci progression which had initially been worked out on graph paper, as can be seen in *Untitled (Study for a Three-Way Fibonacci Progression)* (1966). The specific object, still integral to *One, Two, Three*, is pulled apart into multiple instances derived from the same logic. *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* takes the process further, incorporating the schema into the form of the work and de-emphasising the significance of its material realisation by the use of photographic documentation. The system, rather than the objects it produces, moves toward the foreground.

Here then we will insist on a distinction between serial and systematic methodology since it leads into a discussion of how we might define a systems art. Broadly, we can state that minimalism deployed a serial methodology as part of its move beyond specific objects but that a systematic methodology was deployed as a means of exit from minimalism’s residual emphasis of the material qualities of the work of art. In this regard, it is instructive to compare Sol LeWitt’s *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)*, first published as a proposal in *Aspen Magazine* 5/6 (1966), and

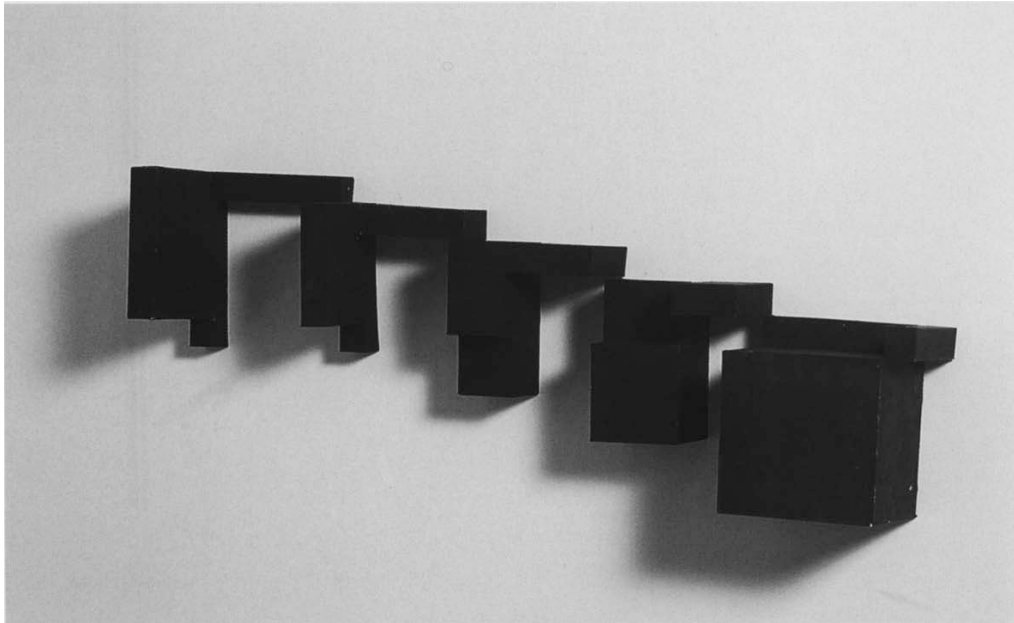


Fig. 11. Mel Bochner, *Three-Way Fibonacci Progression* (1966).

subsequently fabricated and exhibited at the Dwan Gallery in New York in 1967, with Victor Burgin's *Carton Programme* (1968) published in the fourth issue of Stephen Willats' underground art magazine *Control*, but never actually realised as a physical structure. Sol LeWitt's *Serial Project #1 ABCD* (1966) [Fig.12] was captioned in the following way:

*One set of nine pieces.
The individual pieces are composed of a form set equally within another and centred. Using this premise as a guide no further design is necessary.
The cube, square and variants on them are used as grammatical devices.
These pieces should be made without regard for their appearance but to complete the variations that are pre-set.
A row of three in any direction, including diagonals will complete the idea of one series, which is autonomous.
All pieces made of aluminium with baked enamel.
Each individual piece of the nine is autonomous and complete. All major permutations are accounted for within the set of 9. 4 sets of 9 complete the idea. The grid system is a convenience. It stabilizes the measurements and neutralises space by treating it equally.
Further variations are in complete sets of nine pieces each. This plan includes only Set A. Set B is the same in all respects except the inside form of each piece is enclosed (solid-sided) while the outside form remains open. In Set C the inside form is open and the outside is closed. All forms are closed in Set D. All sets seen together represent the completion of the plan.*

In *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)* a simple system of serial progression and variation generated a complex visual result. Here LeWitt extended the strategy he had begun with simpler works such as *Wall Structure* (1963) and *Floor/Wall Structure* (1964). In these works LeWitt, though generating the form of the works from simple permutational schema, was still working within a minimalist rubric: his “structures” were clearly negotiating their way out of a residual relation to the categories of painting or relief or sculpture as well as challenging the specificity of Judd's specific objects by means of their permutations. Though LeWitt's strategy went beyond the straightforwardly repetitious series of Judd, there was no apparent reflection beyond the limits of the work evident in the work itself. No suggestion as to why this systematic logic presented itself at this time, and in this

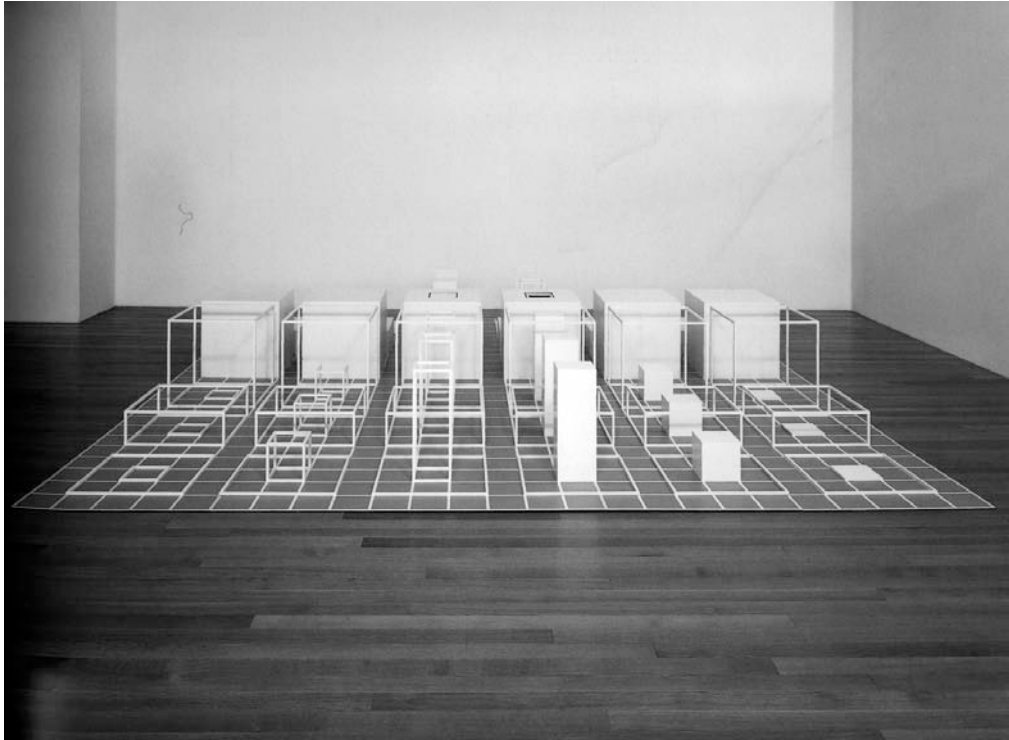


Fig.12. Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)* (1966).

place. LeWitt remained consistent with minimalism's infamous refusal of signification and did not obviously consider the "cultural infrastructure of forming" that had begun to preoccupy Morris.

In contrast, Burgin's *Carton programme* displayed an ironized relationship to minimal, pop and tech art. Running on binary code, Burgin's work was a basic computational program. If LeWitt's *Serial Project* can be read crudely, yet not superficially, as unconsciously reproducing the systematic logic of advanced industrial production, then Burgin's *Carton programme* explicitly and rather archly drew attention to this. Burgin submitted *Carton programme* to *Control* magazine just as he was preparing to return to the UK having concluded his MFA at Yale in 1967. Here the young artist had been exposed to the full ensemble of debates surrounding minimalism (Robert Morris was a tutor at Yale during Burgin's studies). Burgin's *Carton programme* remains little-known and even less commented on. This stands in marked contrast to the sustained critical attention that has been directed toward other magazine-based works of the period, arguments which support key claims concerning the development of conceptual art out of minimalism. It impinges on our account to briefly rehearse some of the claims that have been made on behalf of conceptual magazine pieces since Burgin's work functions rather differently from them.

Alexander Alberro has argued that Robert Smithson and Mel Bochner's "Domain of the Great Bear" (published in *Art Voices* in 1966) "pushes the critique of the art-critical categories developed in the sculptures of Dan Flavin and Carl Andre past the point these minimalist artists seemed willing to take them."⁹⁶ Jeff

Wall, writing on the magazine works of Dan Graham, develops a similar line, observing that “Just as Dan Flavin made sculptures by repositioning common lighting equipment, Graham moved toward making textual art works or ‘magazine pieces,’ as he calls them, by writing about various subjects as if he were writing the essay about its possible status as a work of art.”⁹⁷ Here, Wall restricts his observation to the familiar claim that conceptual art extended the ontology of the artwork across an extended set of possible material supports. It is Buchloh’s reading of the significance of magazine works which remains the most thorough. Focusing on Graham’s *Homes for America* [Fig.13] (published in *Arts Magazine* 1966-67), he observes that: “Anticipating the work’s actual modes of distribution and reception within its very structure of production, *Homes for America* eliminated the difference between the artistic construct and its (photographic) reproduction, the difference between an exhibition of art objects and the photograph of its installation, the difference between the architectural space of the gallery and the space of the catalogue and the art magazine.”⁹⁸

Earlier in the same article, however, Buchloh addresses himself explicitly to the magazine piece’s relation to minimalism: “the work linked Minimalism’s esoteric and self-reflexive aesthetics of permutation to a perspective on the architecture of mass culture...”⁹⁹ Here Buchloh acknowledges the incipient interest in external context and its framing relationship to the ontology of the artwork, but restricts his claims to the architectural relation. It is Brian Wallis who has taken the reading in the most suggestive direction: “*Homes for America* was an attempt to disclose, through an investigation of one aspect of American culture, *the larger systemic logic that governed the field of mass consumption.*”¹⁰⁰ For Wallis then, Graham’s

[illegible]

Fig. 13. Dan Graham, *Homes for America* (1966-67)

magazine piece opens on to an entire “systemic” logic, with architecture serving as an exemplar of it.

This reading would seem to find support from Graham himself who acknowledges that in Flavin’s use of fluorescent tubes (work which he openly admired) there was already more at stake than any particular material object’s “possible status” as a work of art: “Use of electric light is related to a specific time in history. Flavin has observed that when the existing system of electric lighting ceases to exist, his art will no longer function.”¹⁰¹ Electric lighting (as art) is suggestively linked to an epoch. Though Graham subsequently returns his discussion to the “cultural framework of the magazine,” his brief reading of Flavin’s relation to the cultural framework *en tout* is both bold and suggestive.¹⁰² Graham’s magazine work brings the art system into focus at the same time as acknowledging its relation to the wider socio-economic system.¹⁰³

Burgin’s work for *Control*, however, operates differently from all of the above. If for Smithson, Bochner and Graham the intention was to intervene in the commercial space of the (commercial) art magazine, to hypothesise the ability for an artwork to be produced out of a non-art context, then Burgin’s goals were more satirical, sceptical about the constitution of an art context altogether.¹⁰⁴ In part, this was related to the different distributional vehicle constituted by *Control* magazine. Willats’ publication was neither mass produced nor widely distributed in the manner of *Artforum* or *Arts Magazine*. Rather, it was produced according to a DIY, artisanal ethic and was proudly marginal to the mainstream art system. More fanzine than glossy, *Control* was obtained by sending Willats payment and

an SAE. Having a small print run and incorporating craft-based personalisation strategies in many of the individual issues (cut-outs, block prints, crayoned sketches etc), *Control* conceived of itself more along the lines of an artist's book.¹⁰⁵ At one level then, *Control* is anti-industrial in form even as it proselytises for an advanced industrial society.

Set up in 1965 and published sporadically since then, *Control* magazine's explicitly stated "main function" was to "publish articles by the personalities which make up the new attitude to visual communication."¹⁰⁶ A graduate of Roy Ascott's Ground Course at Ealing College, Willats' understanding of the "new attitude to visual communication" was heavily inflected by Ascott's teaching linking art and cybernetics (as the magazine's explicit emphasis on control and communication would suggest).¹⁰⁷ Early issues of *Control* set themselves up in opposition to the established art world: "It is of vital importance that a platform exists outside of the old established mechanisms of the Art Hierarchy which allows for completely free discussion of concepts by the artist: this magazine is an attempt to provide this position."¹⁰⁸ They also reflected on the contemporaneous ramifications of the global roll out of a society of control and its implications for artistic practice: "The platform devised for the second issue of this magazine, is the artist's relationship with the Control Mechanism which governs our spheres of operation."¹⁰⁹

Yet *Control* was perhaps most notable for its largely uncritical acceptance of this "Control Mechanism." The maintenance of an "Art Hierarchy" and the latest techniques of social hierarchisation were not perceived to be of the same

order.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the emergence of a cybernated society was read, dubiously, as directly determining both the necessity and desirability of a cybernated art. As Mary Kelly notes of *Control*: “The essays were solicited by the editor Steve Willats, whose main interest was in politically engaged but conceptually oriented art informed by systems and communication theories. Semiotics, which could accommodate the disruptive notion of unconscious processes, was largely ignored (with the exception of Victor Burgin and Dan Graham).”¹¹¹

Control’s contributors, however, did not necessarily subscribe or even stick to the magazine’s editorial line. Here, as Kelly notes, Burgin was exemplary. Burgin’s magazine publication gently militated against its medial support, rather than seeking to disappear into it. He parodied both the art aspirations of *Control* and its ideological focus by way of an early critique of art’s relation to its realisation. Here perhaps its closest analogue would be Fluxus instruction pieces. Burgin described *Carton programme* (1968) in *Control* as follows:

A column of binary notation, expressing the square 212101212 in a state of rest over any given period of time is section from left to right (Fig. 1). Reversal of the half-columns generates five additional configurations (Fig. 2 and 3). Inversion of the column raises the number of configurations to 12 before the cycle is repeated.

Applying an arbitrary directive that only one unit at a time may move, the total number of moves required to complete the cycle is 67. Therefore in addition to the 12 “main states” there are 55 subsidiary states of the system.

Although these drawings refer, for ease of explanation, to the movement of cardboard cartons, any unit might be used over any available plan. The programme is also applied to the movement of cars about a parking-lot—the elapsed time between moves to be determined by random periodic occurrences in the immediate environment.

The transitional moves between main states (Fig. 4) were determined by the criteria of symmetry and economy of effort. More subjective considerations are involved in the specific details of choice of unit and location, so obviously there is an equal possibility of “success” or “failure” in the aesthetic sense—whatever these terms mean in the aesthetic sense.

Burgin's long commentary accompanying *Carton programme*, entitled "Art-Society Systems," glossed the thinking behind the piece. It should be understood as a central part of the work itself.¹¹² Here Burgin demonstrated his cynicism with regard to *Control's* framing problematic "In approaching the problem of social control in art it would seem necessary to first establish, in principle, the particular province of art within the broad area of social control in general."¹¹³

Burgin's words reflected the oppositional politics of their historical moment as well as challenging the value-neutral concept of control with which Willats' magazine operated. Marcuse's longstanding dissection of "the new forms of control" proved widely influential in the formation of a New Left politics, and Burgin's challenge was informed by a similar spirit to that which animated Marcuse's critical account of the one-dimensional society. The artist made it clear that a positivist, communication-based model of artistic practice did not persuade him: "technological inquiries into "new" media is the result of focusing on the message content and message-carrying capabilities of the object. Failure is inherent in this attitude due to the reverse polarity of object-viewer exchange. Before considering any particular function of an "art object" it would be as well to examine the process by which such a category even exists."¹¹⁴

Here Burgin explicitly stated his belief in the futility of experiments in cybernated art and "'new' media," demonstrating how they failed to be socially self-reflexive and remained tied to an object-centred artistic paradigm. Burgin instead insisted on the requirement to inflect artistic practice in the direction of ontological enquiry, leaving behind questions of media. The provocation towards

conventional art practice could hardly be more explicit, nor the incipient relation to the anti-aesthetic concerns and ontological questioning of a nascent conceptual art more manifest.

Exit Strategies

Yet just as Burgin was no advocate of “technological enquiries” neither did he support formalist modernism’s restriction of art to its conventional media: “Conceptualism administered a rebuff to the Modernist demand for aesthetic confections and for formal novelty for its own sake. It disregarded the arbitrary and fetishistic restrictions which ‘Art’ placed on technology – the anachronistic daubing of woven fabrics with coloured mud, the chipping apart of rocks and the sticking together of pipes – all in the name of timeless aesthetic values.”¹¹⁵ *Carton programme*, Burgin’s first mature work, referenced the gamut of postformalist practices: the procedural element of the work clearly relates to the serial permutations of late minimalism; the invocation of the variable commodity “unit” is pure pop (either Warholesque cardboard “cartons” or “cars” are suggested for possible realisations of the piece); and the fact that *Carton Programme* depended on “binary notation” suggests tech art’s reductive technological determinism. Yet the work announces its distinction from all three “movements.”

Most markedly, Burgin’s *Carton programme* operates at the moment of relay between minimalism and conceptual art. Tracking the trajectory of this work opens up a set of debates about the relationship between the two “movements.” Systems art stands as a largely forgotten mediator in existing art-historical accounts of the development of conceptual art out of minimalism and in reaction formation to pop art and tech art. Discussion of serial art or seriality has so far filled the role of linking minimal and conceptual art (with the systematic regularly

mistakenly equated with the serial). Yet “serial art” as a category is neither sufficiently critically substantive, nor sufficiently historically actual, to fulfil this task. By recovering systems art (both as critically substantive and demonstrably historically actual) and attempting to provide it with some conceptual specificity, we begin to fill in the notoriously ill-delimited category of post-minimalism as well as revisiting a hitherto marginalised narrative concerning the development of conceptual art.

Robert-Pincus Witten coined the term “postminimalism” to describe the art of the middle 1960s through into the 1970s. Glossing his own earlier coinage, Pincus-Witten has described the evolution of postminimalism in the following terms:

Younger artists, excluded from a golden circle of elect painters and sculptors and repulsed by an agenda based in modernist self-referentiality, came to view a reflexive formalism and the gallery system that sponsored it as alien and pernicious. In short, the academy of abstraction became The Enemy and the activities covered by the term Postminimalism emerged. The opposition continued on from the 1960s and 1970s with the conflation of Conceptualism and Minimalism. When that occurred, the cognomen Postminimalism began to take on its own life and the idea that there was this thing out there, this style called Postminimalism, gained ground...¹¹⁶

As this short extract demonstrates, postminimalism’s problem as a category stems from its excessive breadth and its positioning of minimalism as the “movement” by means of which to totalise the diversity of competing postformalisms. Yet minimalism might be considered a failed negation of Greenbergian formalism as much as a successful foundation for a new cultural periodisation. Burgin reflected on these contested stakes, writing in 1973 that: “Although what was to be rejected in the post-minimal period of the late 1960’s was, to a greater or lesser extent, held in common” what was to be done by way of revision was “still in

dispute.”¹¹⁷ Systems art was one significant thing done “by way of revision” and *Carton programme* announced its trajectory. Systematic methodology emerged as a means to deal with, and attempt an exit from, the postminimal intensification of an already amorphous postformal condition. Rather than continuing to read the development of art’s problematics formalistically, as a series of challenges relating to the status of the modernist object, it became necessary for artists to open the artwork out in the direction of its social context or, in Burgin’s terms, to consider the “Art-Society System.”

3. Systems Art and the System

Problem Complexes

If conceptual magazine works subverted the art system's demand for discrete, saleable art objects by situating art directly at the level of reproduction (in the process interfering with art's support structure and challenging its promotional function) then Haacke's *Photo-Electric Viewer-Controlled Coordinate System* (1968) [Fig.14] intimated a shift in focus to art's interrelation with other social systems, of which the media was just one. Planned in 1966, but not executed until the artist's second solo show at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1968, *Photo-Electric Viewer-Controlled Coordinate System* presented an expanded and more developed commentary on the "Art-Society System" than that found in Burgin's *Carton Programme* of the same year. Burgin's work challenged the affirmative character of pop and tech art by ironising them. Haacke's practice, in contrast, suggested a deeper critical engagement with a technocratic capitalist system.

Photo-Electric initiated a critique that would come to define Haacke's later, more demonstratively socio-political works such as *Gallery-Goer's Birthplace and Residence Profile, Part I* (1969) and *Part II* (1970) [Fig.15] and, most notably, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) [Fig. 16]. With *Photo-Electric* Haacke went a step beyond the condensation cubes, towers and tablets that he had begun making in Europe.¹ These "weather boxes" [Fig.17] as he originally referred to them retained the object, albeit "minimalised" (as transparent Plexiglas) in an attempt to frame a natural system of evaporation and condensation. Haacke now dropped the framing object altogether and made a play, almost a pun, of turning the gallery space into a system. Using motion sensors Haacke created an invisible grid through



Fig. 14. Hans Haacke, *Photo-Electric Viewer-Controlled Coordinate System* (1968).



Fig. 15. Hans Haacke, *Gallery-Goer's Birthplace and Residence Profile, Part II* (1970).

3. Systems Art and the System

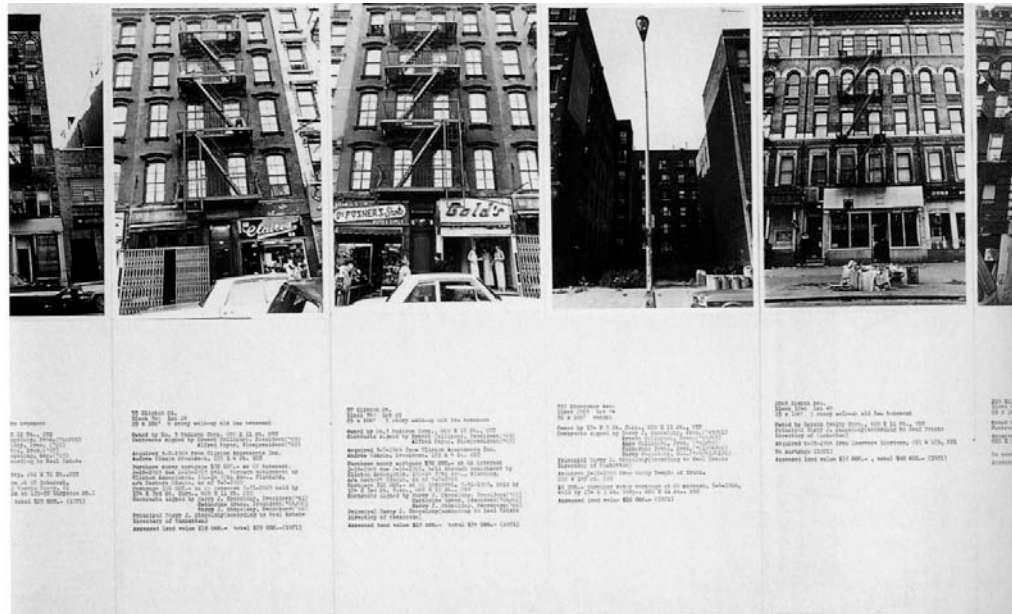


Fig.16. Hans Haacke, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971).

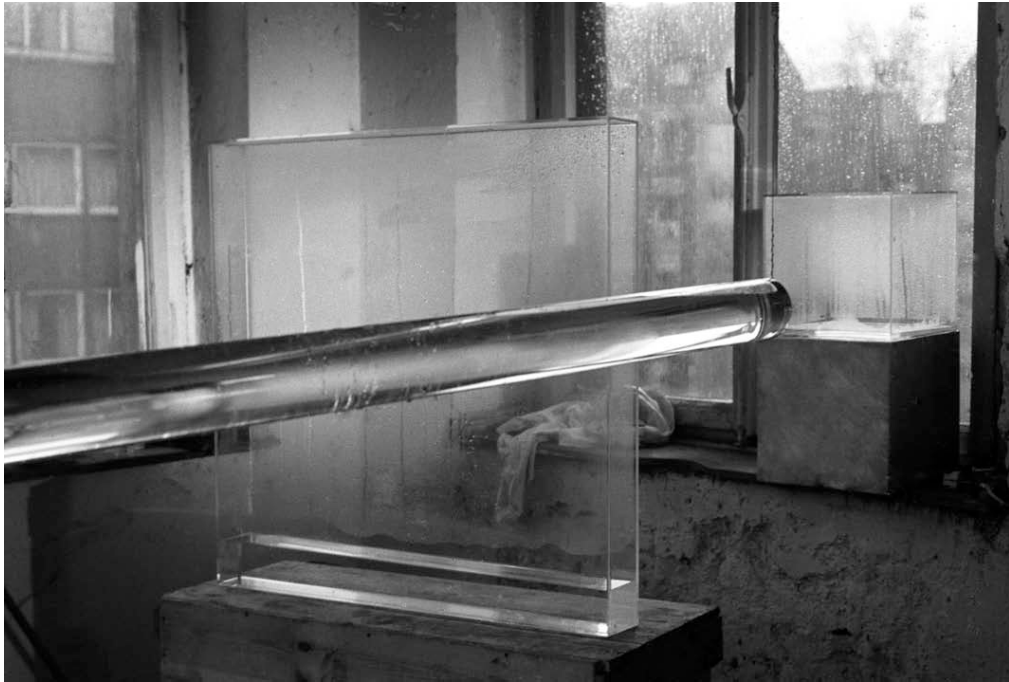


Fig.17. Hans Haacke, *Weather Boxes* (1965).

which the spectator tripped on or off states triggering bulbs mounted in the gallery walls directly above each motion sensor. The modernist grid still evident in LeWitt and Burgin's work here took on a spectral presence. In *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)* LeWitt had retained the grid as the material base from which to elaborate, literally to anchor, his residually object-producing systems. In *Carton programme*, Burgin had permuted hypothetical objects on the grid in order to ironise the systematically derived production of art objects. Haacke, in contrast, concealed the grid, in a "dematerialised" form, only to announce all the more thoroughly the work's systematic locus. The gallery-as-system was made to comment on the gallery system: *Photo-Electric* drew attention to the technological rationality animating the social system of which art was a sub-system.

Haacke's practice announced the arrival of a distinctive "systems art," one that was clearly distinct from an increasingly museologically incorporated minimalism as well as the affirmative quality of pop and tech art. For while *Photo-Electric* might be read as a technophilic promotion of liberatory play and viewer emancipation, the rigid grid of motion sensors and harsh glare of naked light bulbs were more ambiguous than this, also constituting a critical reflection on the advanced surveillance made possible by technological development. Lured by promises of free interaction, the viewer was in fact ensnared in a highly controlled cell, his or her every movement tracked and scrutinized. Participation amounted to no more than the coreography of a routinised existence.² Haacke explained in the catalogue for the exhibition "Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects" (1970) that his working premise was "to think in

terms of systems; the production of systems, the interference with and the exposure of existing systems,” noting that “systems can be physical, biological or social; they can be man-made, naturally existing, or a combination of any of the above.”³

In recovering and emphasising the term “systems art” the intention is not to produce a “movement” where art history does not currently acknowledge one. Rather, the aim is to refocus attention on a specific set of artistic problems. Movements are notoriously imprecise designations and individual artists almost invariably resist the subsumption of their artistic practice under them. By insisting that systems art was constituted by a diverse group of artists working on a complex of artistic problems, movement-oriented constructions are placed in question.⁴ Nevertheless, such an approach does not simply reject the art historical convention of the “movement.” The historically constitutive nature of the critical convention cannot simply be discarded, however much artists or theorists might wish it away—a shorthand way to refer collectively to individual artists pursuing related projects remains indispensable to writing on art. However, by insisting on not resolving systems art’s relation to other, more established artistic “movements” as a “movement” we work both with and against the convention. Like (unevenly) interlocking segments of a three-set Venn diagram, systems art sits as part of minimal, conceptual and tech art as well as being distinct from all three of them. It shares some of each of their problems as well as possessing its own proper concerns. Drawing out the precise nature of systems art’s interrelation with more art historically “settled” problem-complexes gives us reciprocal purchase on all of them.

Thinking about artistic movements in terms of shared problems helps emphasise the continuity, as well as the discontinuity, that exists between them. Problem-complexes entail response-complexes, but certain boundary conditions serve to distinguish individual “movements” from each other. For example, pop, minimal, tech and conceptual art make different and incompatible responses to the question of artistic technique’s appropriate relation to social technique. Schematically, and necessarily reductively: pop and tech art affirm social technique, minimal art aims to neutrally present it (but is arguably incorporated by it) whereas conceptual art critiques it (albeit by imitating its logic).⁵ Such responses serve to distinguish pop from minimalism from conceptual art, even where they hold a problem in common.

Systems art has faded from view along with its proper name. Yet the problems raised by systems art were not comprehensively resolved. These problems—*the residually aesthetic presentation of the artwork; the ontologically constitutive role of the situation for the artwork; the relation of artistic and social technique; the relationship of art to the art system; the relationship of the art system to other social systems*—have resurfaced in more recent “relational” and “context” art. Consequently, it becomes clear that the analytical conceptual art that supplanted systems art historically, did not, in fact, definitively supersede it. Rather, to the contrary, we can recover a distinctive “systems art” that evolved into a “systematic” mode of conceptual art and which, from the perspective of the present, is more pertinent to the genealogy of contemporary art. In the movement from the “production of systems” to the “interference with and exposure of existing systems” noted by Haacke there was both an increasing conceptualisation and an increasing

politicisation of the art so produced. As Haacke was later to make explicit, systems could be turned on “the System,” producing “a critique of the dominant system of beliefs while employing the very mechanisms of that system.”⁶ The trajectory of Haacke’s development—from the utilisation of logical systems of ordering in *B1-61* to intervention in socio-political systems in *Shapolsky et al.*—was one tracked, albeit with significant variations, by other artists including Mierle Lademan Ukeles, Mel Bochner, Adrian Piper and Mary Kelly.

Before discussing the different modes of conceptual art in depth in chapter four it is necessary to consider in greater detail the emergence and consolidation of systems art as a distinctive response-complex rather than merely a “systematic” method internal to minimalism as had been described by Bochner.

Art and Technological Rationality

For Charles Harrison there is a strong distinction to be drawn between conceptual art “proper” and conceptual art as a “broad category” which he holds to designate “a cluster of ‘post-minimal’ forms of practice in which objects are mapped or nominated and in which those same or other objects are presented to view, if at all, only as contingent illustrations or demonstrations of some ‘idea’.”⁷ Harrison argues that systematic strategies of art production emerged from within minimalism: “Except in the individual practice of Don Judd... the moment of ‘geometrical’ Minimalism... lasted no more than two or three years. By 1967, the ‘Minimal’ artists Morris, Andre, LeWitt and Smithson, though they continued to produce forms of geometrical object and arrangement for display, all appeared at least as much concerned with the systematic or quasi-systematic nature of hypothesized ‘works’...”⁸ Yet Harrison also acknowledges that systems art went beyond the limits of minimalism:

The following are among the labels variously tried on for relevant components of the late sixties avant garde, or in attempts to catch the unifying flavour of the whole: Post-Object Art, Multiformal Art, Non-Rigid Art, Concept Art, Conceptual Art, Ideational Art, Earthworks, Earth Art, Land Art, Organic-Matter Art, Process Art, Procedural Art, Anti-Form, *Systems Art*, Micro-Emotive Art, Possible Art, Impossible Art, Arte Povera, Post-Studio Art, Meta Art.⁹

Nevertheless, as Harrison explains it: “in their American forms at least – ‘Conceptual art’ and ‘Dematerialization’ were secondary historicist consequences of the qualitative shift which minimalism represented.”¹⁰ Harrison thus insists that an American, dematerialized, post-minimal art should be rigorously distinguished from those properly “conceptual” artists who

began to make work asking direct questions about the ontology of the art work, the constitution of its audience, and the disposition of its spectators.

Was systems art a means of exiting the postformal condition then, or merely its continuation? In order to address this problem it is necessary to discriminate more finely between the different “systematic or quasi-systematic” artistic strategies that Harrison runs together. There is more that can be said of conceptual art as a “broad category” than Harrison’s intemperate caricature: “in New York artist-artisans crossed Dematerialization with the ready-made or with systems theory or with concrete poetry and were transformed into artist-intellectuals or McLuhanite savants or neo-Dada mystics.”¹¹ As Harrison has conceded “Principally because it coincided and at points overlapped with a broad and international ‘anti-formal’ tendency, it has always been less easy to circumscribe the Conceptual Art movement than it is to date it.”¹² Might systems art constitute a moment in conceptual art then? Peter Osborne has argued that the convergence of systems-based concerns in minimalism and pop led to an early formulation of conceptual art as a systems art:

A distinctive type of conceptual work exploring the properties of ideal systems of logical, mathematical and spatio-temporal relations emerged from the elaboration of conceptions of reduction and objecthood forged at the limits of formalist modernism by Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Morris and LeWitt, in the early to mid 1960s. At the same time, a related body of work was produced (notably, by Andy Warhol and Ed Ruscha) that was broadly similar in its formal structures of modular units, serial systems and repetitive ordering, but grounded technologically and socially (rather than mathematically) in relation to machino-facture, photography, film and the commodity form. Subsequently, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these two kinds of work increasingly converged in a conceptual art that reflected upon the relations between these formal mathematical and social dimensions.¹³

In Osborne's scheme, Greenbergian formalist modernism was confronted with its formal limits by minimal art (exploring the minimum set of properties that could count as an art object) and its social limits by pop art (exploring formalist modernism's suppression of social content – albeit in an ambiguous sense, because pop used the commodity and commodity aesthetics as a cipher for the social).¹⁴ Convincing as both of these readings are another 60s art “movement” bears strongly on the development of systems art, namely tech art.

Tech art's contribution was to confront formalist modernism with its material limits by exploring new technological materials as replacements for the traditional mediums. Tech art, however, was problematic as an example of advanced art. Its introduction of new technology held out the utopian horizon of a direct convergence of artistic and social technique in a schema that now looks both suspiciously affirmative of the dominant culture and misguidedly teleological. Tech art also exhibited the tendency to ontologise technology as a new ‘medium.’ In this regard it was sociologically and philosophically naïve (diverse technologies cannot be amalgamated in this way, either functionally or by “essence”) as well as, paradoxically, residually modernist (in the Greenbergian sense): effectively, technology was set up as another logical medium to be explored. Harrison has commented on tech art's failings in exactly these terms: “The task was to appropriate the technologies of electromagnetic and cybernetic systems and to deploy these either to aesthetic or to ‘critical’ ends. Such work tended to suffer from a trivial equation of ‘modernity’ with scientific and mechanical development. It also tended to be co-opted by the very representational technologies it set out to exploit.”¹⁵

The significance of the systematic strategies employed in minimalism and tech art can best be elaborated as an attempt to reinstate the constructivist program to harmonise artistic and social technique.¹⁶ Jeff Wall captures the importance of constructivist elements in the art of the 1960s concluding: “Even by the end of the 1960s it had become clear that the Constructivist elements in Minimalism were only a feeble residue of the socially-aggressive aspects of the original movement, filtered through Bauhaus streamlining and American ‘systems’ ideas.”¹⁷ However Wall’s account here, as with Harrison’s, is not sufficiently nuanced. Wall associates “‘systems’ ideas” only with minimalism and mistakenly assumes that the systems ideas in play were all “American.” In fact, it was the (often awkward) elision of European (critical) and American (positivist) “systems ideas” that merged in systems art and which constitute the basis of its development into a systematic conceptual art.

As we saw in chapter two, an internal case for the emergence of a distinctive systems art in the late 1960s can be made, principally through the rejection of artistic expressivity and the various postformalist attempts to develop minimal art’s avoidance of compositional relationships beyond the formal confines of the specific object. Yet the broader influence of systems thinking on multiple, external domains of intellectual enquiry must also be brought to bear on this issue. Furthermore, the prevalence of systems thinking across academic disciplines must itself be contextualised in terms of broader socio-economic developments, specifically the ramification of advanced industrial society as facilitated by the rollout of the first computer revolution. Jameson, basing his analysis on Mandel’s account of the third technological revolution,” stresses the

fact that the Sixties constituted a “momentous transformational period” in which “systemic restructuring” took place on a “global scale.”¹⁸ The specific problem-complex addressed by systems art should therefore also be referred to problem complexes in other social and intellectual domains. Rather than any simple argument about the determination of superstructural cultural forms by an economic base, here the principle will be to hold to Adorno’s insistence that, given the artwork’s status as a commodity (albeit a commodity both like and unlike any other), society is immanent to art. In such a reading, an art-immanent account of artist’s turn to the use of systems is also, necessarily, a social account:

The elements of an artwork acquire their configuration as a whole in obedience to immanent laws that are related to those of the society external to it. Social forces of production, as well as relations of production, return in artworks as mere forms divested of their facticity because artistic labour is social labour... Scarcely anything is done or produced in artworks that does not have its model, however latently, in social production.¹⁹

Michael Corris has commented on the way in which “the concept of a ‘system’... became part of the lingua franca of the 1960s.”²⁰ Systems discourse colonised diverse academic disciplines from biology to sociology. To name some of the most influential examples: Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s General Systems Theory, Norbert Weiner and Ross W. Ashby’s Cybernetics, Claude Shannon’s Information Theory, Talcott Parsons’ Sociology.²¹ Systems thinking was quickly applied to management theory and, thereby, to corporate practice. Here the most notorious example was Robert McNamara’s use of systems analysis to turnaround Ford’s profitability (literally inaugurating postfordism) and, subsequently, strategic priorities at the Pentagon. It was systems thinking as applied by McNamara and lesser technocrats that prompted the colloquial

sense of “the System” as it came to be understood in the Sixties and Seventies, that is, as shorthand for the post-War development of the Western nation state as a Military-Industrial Complex. Nevertheless, systems thinking also found its way into oppositional artistic and political movements. Corris stresses the political multivalence of systems thinking in the 1960s, noting that it “was not destined to remain the exclusive property of a technologically minded elite of engineers, scientists, and mathematicians. In the hands of intellectuals, artists, and political activists, it would become an essential ideological component of the ‘cultural revolution.’”²²

Consequently, the systems discourse adopted or internalised by the systems art of the late 60s was marked by a profoundly ambiguous character – potentially progressive or reactionary, depending on its deployment within individual art works. Peter Osborne has commented on the “inherent ambiguity of systems art in the 1960s” given that “it opposed the traditional (Romantic bourgeois) conceptions of art and the artist using the latest methodological tool of social control.”²³ Hans Haacke’s work perhaps best captures this ambiguity and it is for this reason that Fredric Jameson has referred to the “homeopathic” quality of his practice.²⁴ Jameson’s insight can, however, be applied more generally. Michael Corris insists that: “Conceptual art recoded the scientific theories that helped drive the technological revolution of the 1960s as an aesthetic ideology.”²⁵ Such an ideology might nonetheless be more accurately designated *anti-aesthetic* since artists discarded formalism and theorised art by means of repurposed “systems” theories derived from outside art’s traditional support structure in philosophical aesthetics.

While Corris' argument is clearly helpful as a symptomology, we need to develop his line of questioning by considering in more detail the reasons *why* artists embraced the positivist theories and outlook of the natural and social sciences. What was it about systems thinking that seemed worth, or even amenable to, appropriating and "recoding"? Others were more sceptical about the possibility of repurposing positivistic, purportedly "value-free" theory for political ends. Frankfurt School theory protested the historical triumph of a technocratic, systematizing positivism. Marcuse noted the emergence of a "total empiricism in the treatment of concepts" observing that "the new mode of thought was "the predominant tendency in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and other fields," and drawing the political conclusion that positivism "forms the academic counterpart to the socially required behaviour."²⁶

It was in opposition to the "socially required behaviour" demanded by the burgeoning technocracy of the Sixties that conceptual art developed, in tune with a wider counter-culture.²⁷ Rather than adhering to Buchloh's well-established, if no longer hegemonic, developmental narrative which finds conceptual art's origin in an "aesthetic of administration" and traces its development into a "critique of institutions," an alternative genealogy can be outlined which argues for conceptual art's origins in a postformalist systems art and notes its development into a fully-formed systematic conceptual art. This alternative genealogy focuses on conceptual art's critical relation to Herbert Marcuse's concept of "technological rationality" (borrowed by Jack Burnham in his theory of systems aesthetics) rather than insisting on its affirmative, even

if inadvertently so, relation to the logic of “administration” (as borrowed from Max Weber by Buchloh). Conceptual art’s “systematic” mode focused on the way in which “the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration” could be made to work *on* and *against* their own internal contradictions, even as these “laws” were also encoded in social “institutions.”²⁸ For as Marcuse had observed of Weber’s concept in 1965, administration had its own limits:

The specialized scientific administration of the apparatus as formally rational domination: this is the reification of reason, reification as reason, the apotheosis of reification. But the apotheosis turns into its negation, is bound to turn into its negation. For the apparatus, which dictates its own objective administration, is itself instrument, means – and there is no such thing as a means “as such”... But if the bureaucratic administration of the capitalist apparatus, with all its rationality, remains a means, and thus dependent, then it has, as rationality, its own limit.²⁹

Systems art aimed to work against “the System” by mimicking technological rationality; it absorbed and redeployed systems theory, cybernetics, and information theory as the anti-art component in its dialectical sublation of formalist modernism. In this sense then, artists’ “recoding” of positivist discourse can be thought of as opposing the prevailing technological rationality with an (anti-aesthetic) aesthetic rationality. This paradox defines the character, strengths and limitations of systems art.

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse extended Adorno and Horkheimer’s account of instrumental rationality by giving an account of its intensification into a form of “technological rationality.” Claus Offe has succinctly characterised Marcuse’s concept as “an interpretation of the social process of rationalization according to which bureaucracy and technology have been

released from the control of particular interests and have themselves become institutions of domination. No longer a purely 'neutral' potential for power, abstract rationality expands into the total structure of society."³⁰ Marked by the deepening of the dialectic of enlightenment, the technocratic society that resulted from the generalisation of technological rationality was characterised both by increasing affluence and increasing domination:

As the project unfolds, it shapes the entire universe of discourse and action, intellectual and material culture. In the medium of technology, culture, politics, and the economy merge into an omnipresent system which swallows up or repulses all alternatives. The productivity and growth potential of this system stabilise the society and contain technical progress within the framework of domination. Technological rationality has become political rationality.³¹

Marcuse attributed an autonomous and totalitarian political agency to technological rationality, one which challenged more traditionally-conceived accounts of the form of totalitarian domination: "Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes of totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution..."³² Given the emergence of such social conditions under advanced industrial capitalism, Marcuse noted the risk that technological rationality might subsume the aesthetic rationality which, while necessarily mimicking it, had traditionally been conceived as the primary means of resisting its dominance. Such a process would constitute the "repressive desublimation" of art: "The developing technological reality undermines not only the traditional forms... it tends to invalidate not only certain 'styles' but also the very substance of art."³³

Marcuse, however, wrote *One-Dimensional Man* before he had had any substantive involvement with the counter cultures. Marcuse was, following Habermas' characterisation, habitually "the most affirmative amongst those who praised negativity," and exposure to the seditious energy of the counter cultures led him, to develop, albeit cautiously, a more optimistic account of the prospects for artistic resistance to the totalitarian development of technocratic society.³⁴ Marcuse later modified the argument he had advanced in *One Dimensional Man* in a companion article entitled "Art in the One Dimensional Society" (1967). Here he insisted more strongly on the liberatory potential of art:

When I saw and participated in their demonstration against the war in Vietnam, when I heard them singing the songs of Bob Dylan, I somehow felt, and it is very hard to define, that this is really the only revolutionary language left today. Now, this may sound romantic, and I often blame myself for being too romantic in evaluating the liberating, radical power of art... And still, the survival of art may turn out to be the only weak link that today connects the present with hope for the future.³⁵

In this article Marcuse developed a dialectical alternative to his own account of art's repressive desublimation, namely the thesis that art might enact a liberating sublimation of technique (and vice versa) thereby constructing a new rationality for a new society: "Has the time come for uniting the aesthetic and the political dimension, preparing the ground in thought and action for making society a work of art? ... Do not the achievements of technological civilization indicate the possible transformation of art into technique and technique into art?"³⁶

The advanced “systematic” art of the late 1960s did constitute itself, in part, by attempting just such a “transformation of art into technique.” Decisively inflected by its exposure to the counter cultures, Marcuse’s thought subsequently became one of the leading theoretical resources for them by way of its influence on New Left politics.³⁷ Jeff Wall has acknowledged that “the ideas of Marcuse” were “among the dominant influences upon the New Left critique of culture and art after 1968” and, as was discussed in chapter one, has offered a reading of the emergence of conceptual art that is indebted to Frankfurt School theory:

Its first response to the political upheaval which began in the 1960s, was an appropriation of mechanical and commercial techniques in an assault upon ‘Art’, and constitutes the basis of both its radicalism and its faculty of historical memory. But insofar as it was unable to reinvent social content through its socialization of technique, it necessarily fell prey to the very formalism and exhibitionism it had begun by exposing (though it managed in the process to drive that formalism to a new level of internal decomposition).³⁸

Though Wall stresses the fact that conceptual art was “unable to reinvent social content through its socialization of technique” it is also notable that he insists on the “incomplete” character of conceptual art. For Wall conceptual art remains unresolved and thus susceptible to being reactivated in the present.³⁹ Furthermore, on Wall’s account, it was the inability to reinvent social content, rather than the failure to socialize technique, which was at the heart of the failure of historical conceptual art.⁴⁰

For Wall, the “socialization of technique” was precisely what a recognisably conceptual art first constituted itself around: “Conceptual art emerged from the disappointment and dissatisfaction with these art movements [minimalism,

pop] over the fact that the social forces and ideas which had been stirred and revived by the aggressively mechanistic and anti-expressive aspects of the new art, did not extend into the kind of radically explosive and disruptive expression desired within the cultural New Left.”⁴¹ In this sense Wall’s account partially mirrors Marcuse’s own reading of the developmental trajectory of the new art, as expressed in his 1970 essay “Art as a Form of Reality:” “The development of Art to nonobjective art, minimal art, antiart was a way toward the liberation of the subject, preparing it for a new object-world instead of accepting and sublimating, beautifying the existing one, freeing mind and body for a new sensibility and sensitivity which can no longer tolerate a mutilated experience and a mutilated sensibility.”⁴² Wall’s account adds the caveat that such hopes were frustrated.

However, what Marcuse would not countenance, even though he acknowledged “the cognitive function of Art,” was that the anti-art of the 1960s, and specifically conceptual art, posed its challenge as an *enduringly* anti-aesthetic art.⁴³ Marcuse relied on an account of art’s indivisibility from aesthetic form: “The antiart of today is condemned to remain Art, no matter how “anti” it strives to be. Incapable of bridging the gap between Art and reality, of escaping from the fetters of the Art-Form, the rebellion against “form” only succeeds in a loss of artistic quality: illusory destruction, illusory overcoming of alienation.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, Marcuse would not go beyond a traditional attachment to art as aesthetic, with the result that anti-art was seen merely as the short-term means by which the sublation of art into life was sought in order to achieve a long-term aestheticisation of reality. The aesthetic was to “migrate” from art into life

thereby invalidating the category of art. This was Marcuse's materialist recasting of Hegel's end of art thesis.

Ultimately, though, for Marcuse, given the repressive character of the existing reality, it was traditional aesthetic art that held open the promise of freedom in an unfree society: "the affirmative power of art is also the power which denies this affirmation. In spite of its (feudal and bourgeois) use as a status symbol, conspicuous consumption, refinement, art retains that alienation from the established reality which is at the origin of art."⁴⁵ As Gregory Battock remarked in a contemporary assessment of Marcuse's relevance to the art of the Sixties: "Unfortunately, he assumes a rather traditional aesthetic orientation that, I believe, is flatly rejected by many new artists."⁴⁶ Jack Burnham sought to develop Marcuse's work, applying his concepts to an anti-aesthetic postformalist art and thus beyond the limits of Marcuse's aesthetic traditionalism.

Systems Aesthetics

Jack Burnham's views on systems and art were first set out in print in "Sculpture as System," the second part of his first book *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (1968). Against what he perceived to be the continued dominance of an idealistic art history informed by Alois Riegl's concept of the *kunstvollen*, Burnham sought to produce an alternative, materialist account of art's development for which historical precedent was to be found in the works of Gottfried Semper and Siegfried Gideon (that is to say precisely those theorists whose *kunstmaterialismus* Riegl had rejected). In *Beyond Modern Sculpture* Burnham outlined an alternative to what he described as the "weary vocabulary" of formalist modernism in "systems consciousness" which he held to enact a shift "from the direct shaping of matter to a concern for organizing quantities of energy and information. Seen another way, it is a refocusing of aesthetic awareness—based on future scientific-technological evolution—on matter-energy information exchanges and away from the invention of solid artefacts."⁴⁷

Yet the weaknesses of *Beyond Modern Sculpture* as a viable alternative to formalist aesthetics were manifest. Burnham limited his analysis to the development of sculpture (which had been his own medium as an artist) and developed an explanatory schema that was wildly teleological. Burnham's concluded his book by outlining his "Teleological Theory of Modern Sculpture" which culminated with the resolution of the art/life dichotomy through a fantastical sci-fi fusion of the two: "The stabilized dynamic system will become not only a

symbol of life but literally life in the artist's hands and the dominant medium of further aesthetic ventures. In retrospect, we may look upon the long tradition of figure sculpture and the brief interlude of formalism as an extended psychic dress rehearsal for... intelligent automata..."⁴⁸

Proceeding on the basis that (what he took to be) Marx's concept of reification was the most salient characteristic of the "capitalist system," Burnham, produced an account of sculpture's development in terms of its progressive reification: "Reification moves sculpture from its passive state as contemplative art toward more precise approximations of the systems which underlie operational reality."⁴⁹ Here Burnham mistook reification for a Marxian concept (it actually results from Lukàcs' conflation of Marx and Weber) and, more pertinently, produced a confused account of art's relation to reification.⁵⁰ Burnham exemplified, although apparently unknowingly, Weber's account of reification as rationalization by arguing that art was progressively subjected to the logic of instrumental, means-ends rationality. However, Burnham failed to recognise that reification was intrinsic to autonomous art from the beginning. As Adorno remarked:

Works of art which by their existence take the side of the victim of a rationality that subjugates nature are even in their protest constitutively implicated in the process of rationalization itself. Were they to try to disown it, they would become aesthetically and socially powerless: mere clay. The organizing, unifying principle of each and every work of art is borrowed from that rationality whose claim to totality it seeks to defy.⁵¹

Reification then is intrinsic to art and to art's ability to protest the social conditions it is subject to. Burnham in a sense symptomatically reproduced, rather than argued for, the conditions that an autonomous art was obliged to

negotiate under social conditions marked by technological rationality. Burnham's work exemplified the "aporetic" situation of art as understood by the Frankfurt School.⁵²

Krauss' critique of *Beyond Modern Sculpture* as "technocratic" was therefore apposite: "The technocratic premise of *Beyond Modern Sculpture* regards the aim of re-creating life... as natural to both science and art and therefore as morally neutral. But many liberal and Marxist historians and social philosophers have labored to show us that these technocratic goals are not value-free, but are products of a social and economic system for which "control" of that kind is the logical corollary."⁵³ However, Krauss' critique was made in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977) which was published nine years after the first appearance of *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. Here Krauss made no reference to any of Burnham's subsequent theoretical work, and consequently her critique appears partial. Burnham's attempt to develop postformalist art theory as a "systems aesthetics" is only worked out after Burnham takes on board criticisms levelled at *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, criticisms made well before Krauss'. Not unsurprisingly Burnham dropped his teleological claims in his later work but nonetheless remained attached, albeit in a sublimated form, to the vision of a "fusion" between art and technics that had stood at the end of his teleology.

Burnham published a series of "systems" essays between 1968 and 1970: "Systems Esthetics" (1968); *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* (1969); "Systems and Art" (1969); "Real Time Systems" (1969); "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems" (1970); and "Notes on Art and Information Processing" (1970).⁵⁴

Though “Systems Esthetics” was the first “systems” article published by Burnham, and proved subsequently to be the most influential, it is important to establish the context of the claims he made there with reference to *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* and “Systems in Art” (which recounted Burnham’s formative pedagogical experience teaching an “Art and Systems” course at the Technological Institute of Northwestern University).

Burnham’s *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* was written in September 1968 but was not presented until January 1969 as a lecture at The Pennsylvania State University.⁵⁵ *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* consisted of an extended exegesis and critical commentary on Marcuse’s thought up to 1968, largely focused on his aesthetics. Though he referred to earlier works by Marcuse, Burnham’s interpretation concentrated on *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* and “Art in the One-Dimensional Society.”⁵⁶ Marcuse’s intellectual influence on Burnham has passed almost unremarked in the existing scholarship.⁵⁷ The theoretical influences that have been enumerated include Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s General Systems Theory, Norbert Wiener’s Cybernetics and Claude Shannon’s Information Theory. Burnham himself encouraged such oversight by not acknowledging Marcuse’s influence on his most widely known essay “Systems Esthetics,” despite the fact that it was published in September 1968 and was thus closely contemporaneous with the composition of his lecture on Marcuse.⁵⁸

Reading *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* it becomes clear that Burnham drew on Marcusean theory in constructing his theory of systems aesthetics while at the

same time attempting to rectify what he considered to be deficiencies within Marcuse's thought. Burnham took up Marcuse's insight about art's resistance to technological rationality and its possible role in effecting an aestheticisation of technique, turning this in to the stronger, deterministic claim that "art will become an important catalyst for remaking industrial society."⁵⁹ Burnham correctly observed that "the emergence of an *artistic technology* rather than the emphasis on *technical art* was the essence of Marcuse's hopes" yet nevertheless objected to Marcuse's aversion to technical art: "Somehow Marcuse, a master of the dialectic, never consciously comes to the conclusion that newer media are the critical instruments of social liberation."⁶⁰ Here then Burnham revealed his own residual, utopian hopes for art: "A fusion of artistic and technical reason is inevitable once art ceases to function as illusion and ideal appearance."⁶¹

In so doing he misunderstood Marcuse's speculative claims for the potential *sublation* of technological rationality by aesthetic rationality, mistakenly arguing for the possibility of a "fusion" between, or "synthesis" of, incompatible rationalities: "His most subtle speculation is directed towards the traditional antipathy between art and technology... the dialectical synthesis becomes a technology based on esthetic values."⁶² Burnham took Marcuse for a social democrat arguing for a gradualist, rather than a revolutionary, process of artistically led social reform. Hopefully venturing the critique that Marcuse failed to recognise "that cultural forces of assimilation are just as often assimilated by forces which they have sought to engulf," Burnham missed, or chose to ignore, Marcuse's insistence that "Art as a form of reality' means not

the beautification of the given, but the construction of an entirely different and opposed reality. The aesthetic vision is part of the *revolution*.”⁶³ The consequence of Burnham’s (mis)reading was a deradicalisation of Marcuse’s claims.

It is important to stress that what is most notable about Burnham’s theory today is precisely the friction generated by his attempt to integrate Herbert Marcuse’s critical account of technological rationality with the ostensibly “value-neutral” positivism characteristic of the systematic empirical and social sciences. Here Burnham was no doubt effected by his social context, namely, as Jeff Wall has described it, the socially affirmative character of an American “university system” that had been “purged of Marxism during the ‘Cold War’.”⁶⁴ Burnham’s theorising was marked by an awkward, and to some extent disavowed, syncretism. The incompatible tensions marking Burnham’s theory of systems aesthetics proved to be one of the major reasons for its eclipse by emerging strains of art historical postmodernism. Yet by returning to Burnham’s engagement with Marcuse we insist on the revealing tensions that originally animated his theorising. They are tensions that resonate with the contradictions found within conceptual art’s attempt to “recode” positivistic discourse. Burnham’s awkward elision of Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s Systems Theory and Herbert Marcuse’s critical theory formed a central part of his alternative to Greenberg’s formalist modernist aesthetics. Here then there is an interesting structural parallel between Burnham’s work and Habermas’ attempt to reconcile Talcott Parsons and Western Marxism as a central strategy in his project to continue the incomplete project of modernity.

Burnham's "Art and Systems" course, first proposed to Northwestern University in 1965, set out almost all of the issues that he would subsequently explore in *Beyond Modern Sculpture* and the later "systems" essays. Burnham describes his experience of developing and teaching the course in his article "Systems and Art." The course derived from the frustration Burnham had conceived as early as 1962 while trying to teach students how to produce kinetic art (which had been his own form of practice when working as an artist). Burnham asserted that he "came to realize that most educational approaches to this medium degenerate into technique courses... and that aesthetic development tends largely to be forgotten."⁶⁵ Reflecting on his frustration Burnham concluded that "the essential task lies in defining the aesthetic implications of a technological world."⁶⁶ In such a technological world Burnham found little of relevance in the making of traditional aesthetic art, nor in the traditional, Bauhaus-derived, pedagogic methods that were used to inculcate the requisite artistic competence to do so.

Seeking an alternative, contemporary and holistic methodological ground for his teaching Burnham seized upon the "systems analysis and design approach to problem solving."⁶⁷ Recognising from the very first that systems analysis was tainted in the popular imagination by its association with the strategic and operational imperatives of the Military Industrial Complex (he referred to systems analysis being understood to possess an "icy Pentagon-esque logic"), Burnham was nevertheless persuaded that "the systems approach" seemed "to be the one technique which can embrace an understanding of the span of

present-day technology and its consequences.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, he insisted “the trend in research and industry to conceive of machines, information processing equipment, and personnel as a single totality has a distinct affinity with some of the more sophisticated happenings and art environments of the past few years.”⁶⁹ Burnham’s teaching was marked by the attempt to enact a reconciliation between art and technology and his pedagogic goal was making different social systems functionally and aesthetically compatible. Burnham’s ultimate aim, as he expressed it, was a “future rapprochement [sic] between art and technology.”⁷⁰ The telling Freudian slip affected by the typo, whether it was Burnham’s or the copy editor’s, perfectly condenses the tensions that marked Burnham’s project for a “systems aesthetics.”

Though it was published in the same year as *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, “Systems Esthetics” constituted a significant extension of the claims that Burnham made in the book as well as acting as a proactive corrective to some of its deficiencies. Principally, “Systems Esthetics” attempted to extend Burnham’s position on the development of one medium (sculpture) into an overarching and coherent postformalist aesthetics. The article appeared to reject the teleological scheme underlying *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. Burnham was careful to situate his claims in the contemporary moment, avoiding projecting his claims into the future: “The emergence of a “post-formalist esthetic” may seem to some to embody a kind of absolute philosophy, something which, through the nature of its concerns cannot be transcended. Yet it is more likely that a “systems esthetic” will become the dominant approach to a maze of socio-technical conditions rooted only in the present. New circumstances will with time generate other major

paradigms for the arts.”⁷¹ Drawing on an analogy with Kuhn, Burnham sought to explain the paradigm shift represented by the new art of the late 1960s.

The critical focus of systems aesthetics was on precisely the “unobjects” of post-minimal practice, namely, “either environments or artefacts which resist prevailing critical analysis.”⁷² Explicitly repudiating Fried’s formalist objections to “theatrical” art, Burnham asserted, “the term systems esthetic seems to encompass the present situation more fully.”⁷³ Arguing that “current technological shifts” explained the paradigm shift in the visual arts, Burnham sought to apply the “systems analysis” that had emerged in concert with these technological shifts to elucidate the “unobjects” of contemporary artistic practice.⁷⁴

At no point then did Burnham explicitly restrict his theory of systems aesthetics to the theoretical elucidation of the post-minimal systems art with which it was contemporary. However Haacke’s work was undoubtedly central to the development of Burnham’s thinking on systems: “As a close friend of Hans Haacke since 1962, I observed how the idea of allowing his ‘systems’ to take root in the real world began to fascinate him, more and more, almost to a point of obsession.”⁷⁵ Haacke even helped edit Burnham’s *Beyond Modern Sculpture*.⁷⁶ Haacke openly acknowledges his debt the other way around, explaining that Burnham “introduced me to systems analysis,”⁷⁷ and that “the concept of ‘systems’ is widely used in the natural and social sciences and especially in various complex technologies. Possibly it was Jack Burnham, an artist and writer, who first suggested the term... for the visual arts.” For Haacke, systems

aesthetics helped to “distinguish certain three-dimensional situations which, misleadingly, have been labeled as ‘sculpture.’”⁷⁸

It is not clear that Burnham’s systems aesthetics captured the ontology of the art which it purported to describe any more successfully than the indeterminate “postformalism” of which he asserted his theory constituted a development. Ludwig von Bertalanffy was called upon to furnish Burnham with a definition of a system as a “complex of components in interaction” which was so loose as to disqualify nothing much except for the Judean “specific object”. Furthermore the precise status of his concept of “aesthetics” was left entirely undefined within the scope of the essay. Burnham defined the art that a systems aesthetics was supposed to describe only negatively: “the emerging major paradigm of art is neither an ism nor a collection of styles. Rather than a novel way of rearranging surfaces and spaces, it is fundamentally concerned with the implementation of the art impulse in an advanced technological society.”⁷⁹ The closest he came to defining “unobject” art was via a relational ontology, conceptually defined. Hence “the specific function of modern didactic art has been to show that art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and components of their environment” and “conceptual focus rather than material limits define the system.”⁸⁰

The suppressed teleological schema from *Beyond Modern Sculpture* resurfaced in “Systems Esthetics” as a phantasmatic projection of art’s dissolution into life in the present. In fact, rather than defining art, Burnham seemed more interested in pursuing an argument for art’s dissolution under conditions of advanced

industrial capitalism: “In an advanced technological culture the most important artist best succeeds by liquidating his position as artist vis-à-vis society.”⁸¹ Burnham thus proposed what might be described as a technocratic neo-constructivism, that is a constructivism without the revolutionary transformation of society.⁸²

Burnham’s subsequent systems essays developed some of the themes introduced in “Systems Esthetics” without significantly advancing any of them. “Real Time Systems” analysed the operation of the entire “art system” including “art movements,” “stylistic trends” and “business, promotional and archival structures,” by means of a cybernetic analogy with real-time information processing systems.⁸³ Though the analogy was worked too hard to convince, Burnham did suggest that “There are two kinds of artists: those who work within the art system and those who *work with* the art system.”⁸⁴ In so doing he hinted at the political potentiality of interference with the mechanics of the art system, an insight that would be taken up by Haacke. In “The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems” Burnham alluded to the affinity between his theory of systems aesthetics and an emergent “conceptualist” art:

The traditional notion of consecrated art objects and settings will gradually give way to the conclusion that art is *conceptual focus*, and that the boundary conditions of form as process and system transcend the more literal notions of geometrically defined form. Thus any space-time fragment of reality may serve as subject matter. The breakdown and confusion between canonical art forms will continue until it is agreed that they place a false emphasis on physical and sensual isolation as prerequisites for aesthetic valuation.⁸⁵

Burnham further developed this parallel between systems aesthetics and conceptual art in his “Software” exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Here he

showed early works of conceptual art alongside the latest developments in computer technology asserting in his catalogue essay for the show, “Notes on art and information processing,” that his curatorial principle was to “make no distinctions between art and non-art.”⁸⁶ The impetus underlying his curatorial protocol was thus exactly the same as the rationale that supported his theory of systems aesthetics: “Software makes none of the usual qualitative distinctions between the artistic and technical subcultures. At a time when esthetic insight must become a part of technological decision-making, does such a division still make sense?”⁸⁷

In pursuing a fusion of art and technics Burnham’s theory of systems aesthetics would ultimately founder on the fact that it failed to recognise and account for the character and critical priority of systems art as an emergent form of conceptual art. This proved to be the case even though his attempt to produce a postformalist aesthetics had initially looked to be in harmony with developments in the new art. Though Burnham noted the use of systems in art he did not provide a workable theory of systems art. The cultural revolution of the late 1960s, directed against the technocracy, sought to protest against the dominant culture by attacking traditional aesthetic art rather than promulgating the aestheticisation of technique that Burnham hoped for.

Burnham had been one of the individuals Robert Morris recommended Patricia Norvell (then his graduate student at Hunter College) to interview in connection with her Master’s thesis on an emergent conceptual art. In his own interview with Norvell, Morris acknowledged the pertinence of Burnham’s

systems aesthetics while also expressing reservations about Burnham's technological enthusiasms: "Well, I think there's a lot in what he says... But a lot of things he says about... He seems to put a great weight on artists' using certain kinds of sophisticated technology and developing that into a kind of aesthetic, and I don't think that's very relevant."⁸⁸ Morris' concern about the relevance of Burnham's residual technologism would prove well founded.

Burnham's account of artistic production as a systems aesthetics hinted at, but did not follow through on, the separation of systems analysis from systems science and its industrial deployment in systems technology. Even Bertalanffy had cautioned against conflating systems theory with systems science and technology: "The humanistic concern of general systems theory as I understand it makes it different to mechanistically oriented system theorists speaking solely in terms of mathematics, feedback and technology and so giving rise to the fear that systems theory is indeed the ultimate step toward mechanisation and devaluation of man and toward technocratic society."⁸⁹ Burnham's failure to rigorously differentiate systems theory and systems technology caused him to swing between a productive, analogical deployment of systems thinking and a prescriptive insistence on art's necessary fusion with technology. He may have declared, with proleptic accuracy, that art would come to be associated with "conceptual focus," but he also regularly lapsed into a misguided technological determinism: "it now seems almost inevitable that artists will turn toward information technology as a more direct means of aesthetic activity."⁹⁰

Although Norvell did not in the end interview Burnham for her thesis, she did raise the question of the influence of his theory of systems aesthetics with many of the artists she interviewed in 1969. Douglas Huebler and Dennis Oppenheim responded favourably to Burnham's work. Yet it was the negative responses from LeWitt and Smithson that resonate most powerfully today. LeWitt felt that Burnham's theory was constructed too generally, and oriented too determinately, capturing only something of the art of the period: "It's really impossible to make such sweeping statements... and expect them to be even a little bit true... I think that people that do objects, in many cases, do them with a system in mind. But they're still doing objects and they're still doing systems. I don't think that one is necessarily going to replace the other."⁹¹ LeWitt's objection can of course be read as the legitimization of his own practice, one that remained tied to the realisation of objects. Smithson's critique is the sharper and merits quotation in full:

I don't see the trace of a system anywhere. That's a convenient word. It's like "object." It's another abstract entity that doesn't exist... there are things like structures, objects, systems. But, then again, what are they? I think that art tends to relieve itself of those hopes. Like, last year we were in an object world and this year we're in a system world... Jack Burnham is very interested in going beyond and that's a kind of utopian view. The future doesn't exist, or if it does exist, it's the obsolete in reverse... I see no point in utilizing technology or industry as an end in itself or as an affirmation of anything. That has nothing to do with art. They're just tools. So if you make a system you can be sure that the system is bound to evade itself. So I see no point in pinning your hopes on a system. It's just an expansive object, and eventually that all contracts back to points... to me there are only manifestations of thought that end up in language. It's a language problem rather than anything else.⁹²

Given that Smithson's own late minimalist works had been derived via systematic elaboration his claim that he "did not see a trace of a system anywhere" was evidently hyperbolic. Smithson's *Plunge* (1966) [Fig.18] and



Fig.18. Robert Smithson, *Plunge* (1966).

Terminal (1966) clearly fall within a systematic rubric and Smithson had also memorably described the advanced art of the Sixties as entropic.⁹³ Yet in drawing attention to the “language problem” Smithson raised the spectre of the “linguistification” of art that is still frequently held to characterise conceptual art. Even though he had predicted the emergence of art understood as “conceptual focus,” Burnham stopped short of attempting to extend his own theory of systems aesthetics to an emergent conceptual art. In his 1970 *Artforum* article "Alice's Head: Reflections on Conceptual Art" (1970) Burnham took up Seth Siegelaub's stable of artists (Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner) as his principle exponents of conceptual art (albeit offering a caveat indicating that other artists might legitimately be considered conceptual). Notwithstanding other artists “systematic” approach to conceptual art (even articulated from within the Siegelaub stable by Douglas Huebler) Burnham chose to focus on Joseph Kosuth as his principle exponent of conceptual art and as a result missed the significance of the systematic component of early conceptual art which his own theory, identifying art as “conceptual focus,” had gone some way to capturing.⁹⁴ In an *Artforum* article on the problems of criticism written the following year Burnham would accept the “linguistic” definition of conceptual art: “The unpopularity of Conceptualism is to no small extent due to its blatant exploitation of the inherent linguistic and ritualistic nature of art.”⁹⁵

Burnham subsequently rejected his own theory of the aestheticisation of technics but also abandoned what he took to be its corollary, a revolutionary avant-garde art: “Most ironic is the art world's rejection of science and

technology without realizing that the same ethos of ‘progress’ that characterized technological change in the 19th and 20th centuries is equally responsible for the illusion of avant-garde art.”⁹⁶ Subsequently, based on his new conviction as to the linguistic nature of all art, Burnham took up structuralism as an explanatory methodology publishing *The Structure of Art* in 1971.⁹⁷ Consequently, it would be left to the theorist-practitioners of systems art to develop a more persuasive account of the character and significance of their practice.

Theorising Systems Art

Adrian Piper's early work draws out some of the most salient features of systems art as it developed into a recognisably "conceptual" form. Piper's practice was deeply indebted to Sol Le Witt's example. Reflecting on LeWitt's contribution to the emergence of conceptual art, Piper elaborated important elements of the elder artist's work, elements that he himself had left understated. Piper expanded Le Witt's concept of the conceptual "idea" giving it a more determinate expression as a "conceptual system:"

By using the permutation of selected formal properties of an object—its sides, dimensions, or geometrical shape—as a decision procedure for generating the final form of the work as a permutational system, Le Witt moved that system itself, and the idea of that system, into the foreground of the work as its self-reflexive subject matter. Here it is not only the object as a unique particular that has primacy, but *that object as the locus and origin of the conceptual system* it self-reflexively generates.⁹⁸

Piper noted the way in which LeWitt moved the system into "the foreground of the work" but also insisted that the object, despite no longer having "primacy," remained the "locus and origin of the conceptual system" and thus, ultimately, the locus and origin of the work. Notwithstanding Le Witt's own caveat that "Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical" as in LeWitt, so in Piper, realization, however systematically derived, remained integral.⁹⁹ Here art's ontology was not constructed discursively but still via an understanding of art as aesthetic material, even though this materiality might be withheld. In a similar sense, Lawrence Weiner's *Statement of Intent* (1968) argued that the idea of a work "may be fabricated" but "need not to be

built”—the ontology of the work was thus held to rely on the *possibility* of its material realisation.

In fact, for Piper, formal aspects were particularly significant. She did not share LeWitt's stated indifference to the formal outcome of his systematic method: "An example of a point on which I disagree with him concerns the importance of the perceptual presentation of the end product and its value in relation to the total conceptual process."¹⁰⁰ Piper insisted on the structural importance of the relation between the percept and the concept, the quality of the perceptual was held to inflect the coherence and artistic value of the conceptual. In this sense, Piper's early work remained more conventional than LeWitt's, more tied to formal concerns. In LeWitt and Piper the system was conceptualised as ideal (an independent order of relationships distinct from the perceptual realisation of the work) even as its ideality was still bonded to a material base. Realization thus remained essential to both LeWitt and Piper: not only was percept held to point to and determine concept, furthermore it was believed to delimit it. The conceptual system functioned as a restraining device. As Piper set it down in an early (at the time unpublished) statement of 1968: "I am presently interested in the construction of finite systems, that is, systems that serve to contain an idea within certain formal limits and to exhaust the possibilities of the idea set by those limits. This appears to me to be the best way of preventing the potentialities of an idea from extending into infinity..."¹⁰¹

For LeWitt and Piper the "idea" had to be graspable as a discrete object in order that it could legitimately be verified as art. Both artists demonstrated this

in numerous works, each work involving closed, self-contained systems. In *Untitled* (1968), published in issue six of Vito Acconci's *0-9* magazine, Piper set out a rectangular matrix alongside a long list of every co-ordinate on the matrix, plotting them out in imitation of a computer printout.¹⁰² Le Witt's *Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974) [Fig.19] is a classic later example of such a self-contained systematic work. In their production of bounded systems-derived objects, LeWitt and Piper's art remained within an object-specific paradigm, despite their post-specific object emphasis on art as idea as "conceptual system."

By 1970, in what now reads as a hypertrophic development of her desire to bound the system, Piper attempted to systematise not just the production of an individual work but also the entire process of art production. *Three Models of Art Production Systems* (1970), first published in the exhibition catalogue to Kynaston McShine's "Information" exhibition, aimed to logically systematise the production of *all* art.¹⁰³ This attempt to explain the production of art by means of a system extended LeWitt's project to generate specific artworks from ideal systems (whether logical or mathematical) into a project to derive art from ideal systems. In *Three Models of Art Production Systems* Piper gave only three example systems by which art could be produced: "Other models may be constructed using the same four components in varying functional positions."¹⁰⁴ Yet here the clear implication was that more systems could be iterated out of these components in order to present a schematic account of all the possible means by which art might be made.

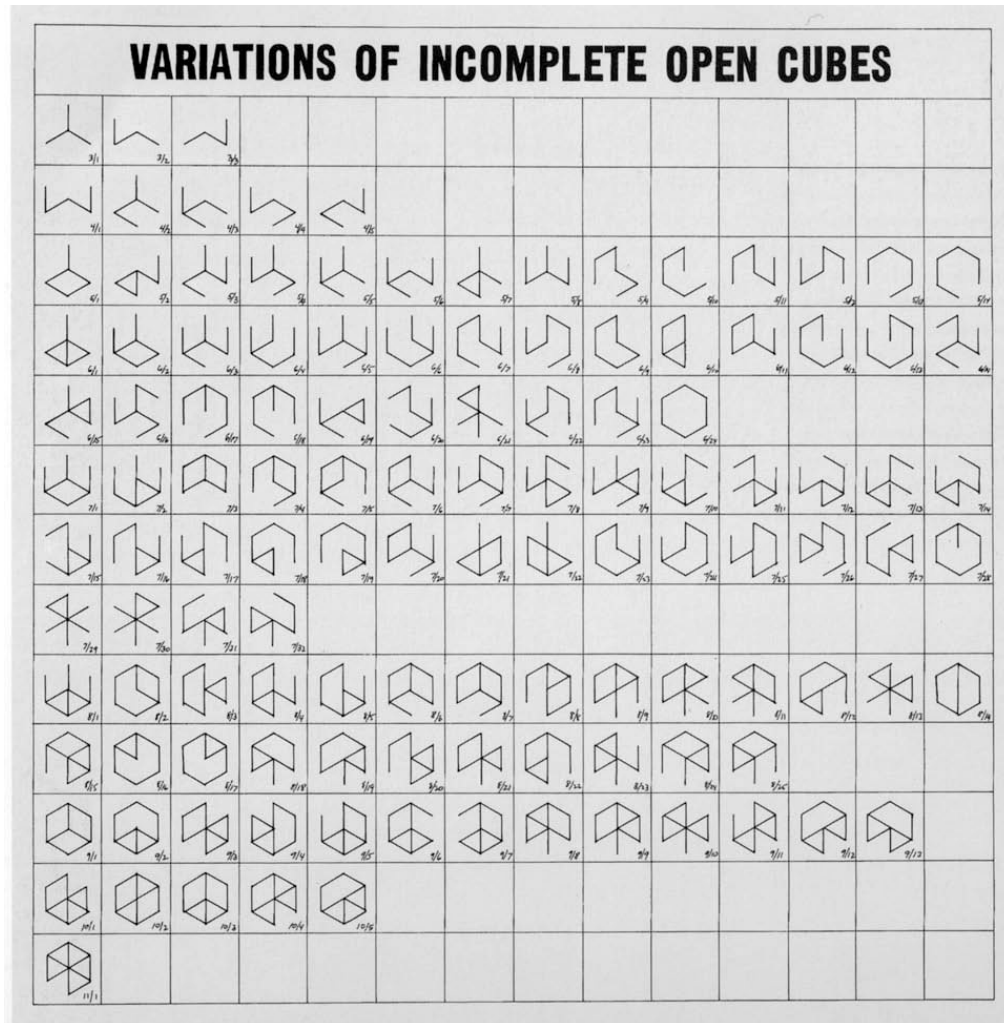


Fig.19. Sol LeWitt, *Schematic Drawing for Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974).

What is most notable about Piper's *Three Models of Art Production Systems* is that the "art context" is definitionally *external* to her systematisation of art: "an art product (*Pa*) is defined as any product (*p*) that is presented in an art context." Her model thus subconsciously relies on an institutional theory of art and is subject to the same problem of logical circularity. If "art" and an "art context" are reciprocally defined, then any systematic account of art production will need to reflect on the constitutive role of the "art context". Piper's model did not achieve this: the "art context" was not put in question at this stage of her work.¹⁰⁵ Piper remained wedded to the belief that art depended on its objectivity: "Any kind of objectivity – whether it is in the formulation of a concretized system, a rational decision-making method, conceptual clarity – can serve only to facilitate the final emergence, in as pure a form as possible, of the artistic idea, which is almost always basically intuitive in nature... I believe very strongly in the necessity of the physical realization of an idea."¹⁰⁶

It would be precisely the issue of how art was constituted with reference to a materially specific art context (rather than by art's materialization as an object) that would form the grounds of the shift within systems art to a "conceptual" mode. It was not until artists' use of conceptual systems became self-reflexive, inverting the percept/concept hierarchy (turning to art's relation to the art system) that systems art emerged as "conceptual."

Victor Burgin's work played a mediating role between a residually object-dependent systems art and a self-reflexive systematic conceptual art. Burgin minimised the systems-derived object to the perceptual limits of the percept-

concept distinction. This move was exemplified in his work *Photopath* (1967-69) [Fig.20], included by Charles Harrison in his English version of “When Attitudes Become Form” (1969) presented at the ICA. Burgin extrapolated the implications of *Photopath* in his 1969 article “Situational Aesthetics.” The residual influence of “Art-Society Systems” (1968), as discussed in chapter two, operated in the background of this later and more substantial piece of theoretical work. Burgin began “Situational Aesthetics” by summarising the post-object trajectory of the advanced art of the period, moving the debate on from Le Witt and Piper’s residual attachment to the primacy of physical realization: “Some recent art, evolving through attention both to the conditions under which objects are perceived and to the processes by which aesthetic status is attributed to certain of these, has tended to take its essential form in message rather than materials.”¹⁰⁷ Burgin, recognised the implications of the move away from the intrinsic significance of artistic materials: “In its logical extremity this tendency has resulted in a placing of art entirely within the linguistic infrastructure which previously served merely to support art.”¹⁰⁸

Burgin, however, was not prepared to accept that the logical extremity of such a trajectory constituted a logical *necessity*: “In its less hermetic manifestations art as message, as ‘software,’ consists of sets of conditions more or less closely defined, according to which particular concepts may be demonstrated. This is to say, aesthetic systems are designed, capable of generating objects, rather than individual objects themselves.”¹⁰⁹ So far then, Burgin simply described work such as LeWitt and Piper’s. Yet Burgin’s locution—“aesthetic systems”—more accurately reflects the percept-concept hierarchy within

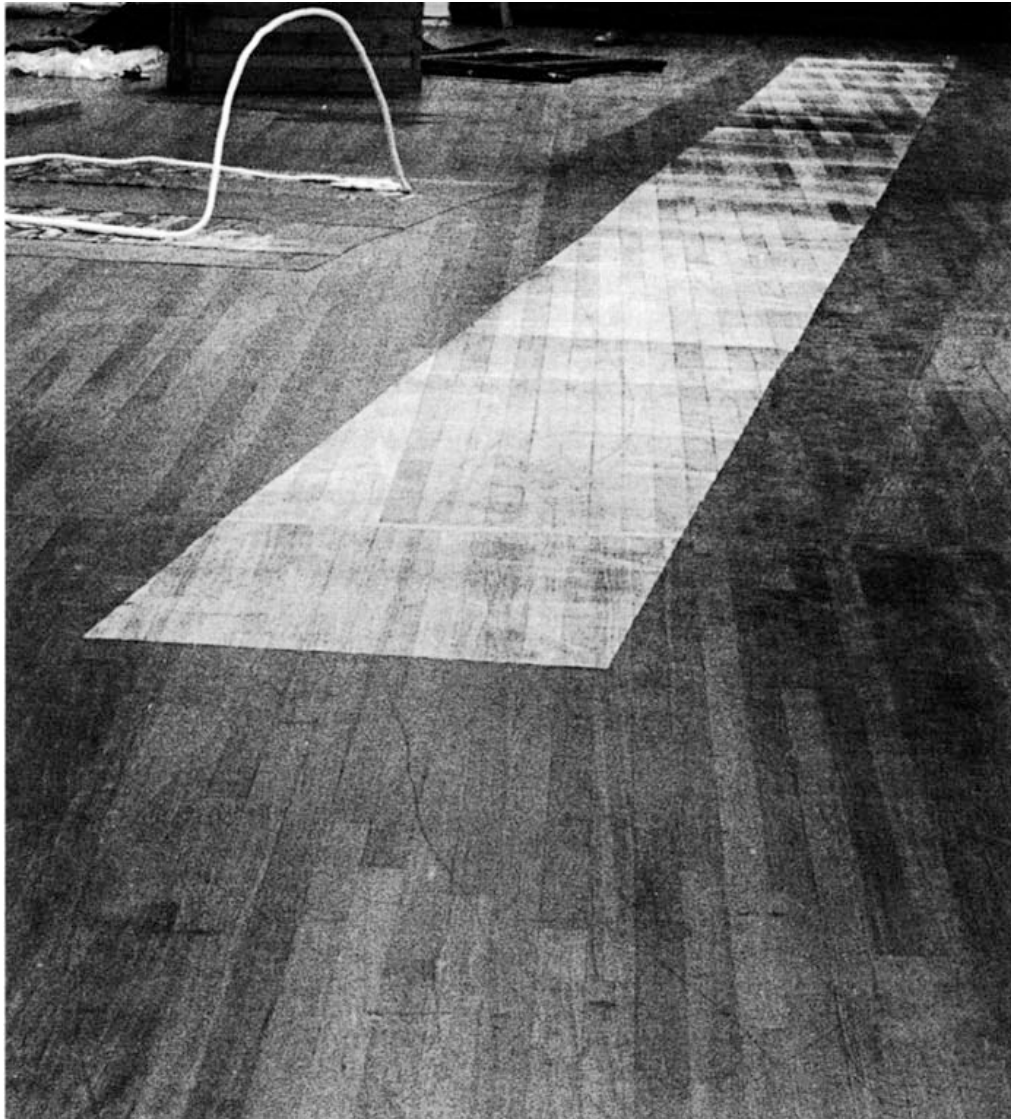


Fig.20. Victor Burgin, *Photopath* (1967-69).

Piper's formulation: though Piper anticipated an art of "conceptual systems" her systems were residually aesthetic. It is, however, in the conclusions that Burgin drew from his survey of the field that we find his distinctive contribution to the debate: "Two consequences of this work process are: the specific nature of any object formed is largely contingent upon the details of the situation for which it is designed; through attention to time, objects formed are intentionally located partly in real, exterior, space and partly in psychological, interior space."¹¹⁰ Peter Osborne has elaborated Burgin's claim:

The artistic significance of materials (medium) is reduced to their productive, communicational or signifying functions (message). However, there is no attempt to restrict art to linguistic materials, since it remains "aesthetic," in the classical sense of working via spatio-temporal aspects of perceptual objects. Nonetheless, this aesthetic dimension functions primarily negatively, directing attention away from itself towards conceptual structures of perception...¹¹¹

It was in the shift to a primarily *negative* function of the aesthetic in Burgin (drawing attention away from itself and towards the conceptual), as compared to the principally *positive* functioning of the aesthetic in LeWitt and Piper (drawing attention towards itself and away from the conceptual) that Burgin innovated. Osborne also expands on Burgin's concept of the aesthetic system: "Aesthetic systems may be understood here as sets of rules governing the formation of objects in perception out of the matrix or flux of space-time... The emphasis is thus on process, rather than the resultant objects, and hence upon 'objects' in an expanded, phenomenological sense that includes the systems through which perceptual objects are generated as themselves 'conceptual objects'."¹¹²

Here then Burgin produced an account of the artistic use of “aesthetic systems” which demonstrated the way in which systems-derived objects were taken up as artworks at the same time as the systems generating the objects were also taken up themselves as “conceptual objects.” This, combined with his contextualist insight that “the specific nature of any object formed is largely contingent upon the details of the situation for which it is designed” (this being what imparted the “situational” character to Burgin’s theory) meant that Burgin, with *Photopath*, took the use of systems in art just to the limit, without reaching it, of setting the ontological status of the work at the level of the system itself. As he observed the following year: “Perhaps it is time for a moratorium on things – a temporary withdrawal from real objects during which the object analogue formed in consciousness may be examined as the origin of a new generating system.”¹¹³

Subsequently Burgin changed the focus of his own artistic practice from art’s situational/contextual character to art’s “less hermetic function as message,” conceived along semiotic lines. However other artists including Hans Haacke, Douglas Huebler and Mel Bochner, extended Burgin’s situational aesthetics without dropping its contextual aspects. Here, for example in Huebler’s *Location* series [Fig.21] or Bochner’s *Measurement* series [Fig.22], the conceptual system was still regarded as the ontological ground of the artwork but the “situational” qualification was not relinquished.

If we compare Burgin’s *Photopath* (1969) and Haacke’s *Gallery Goer’s Birthplace and Residence Profile* (1969), the differences between the two approaches can be

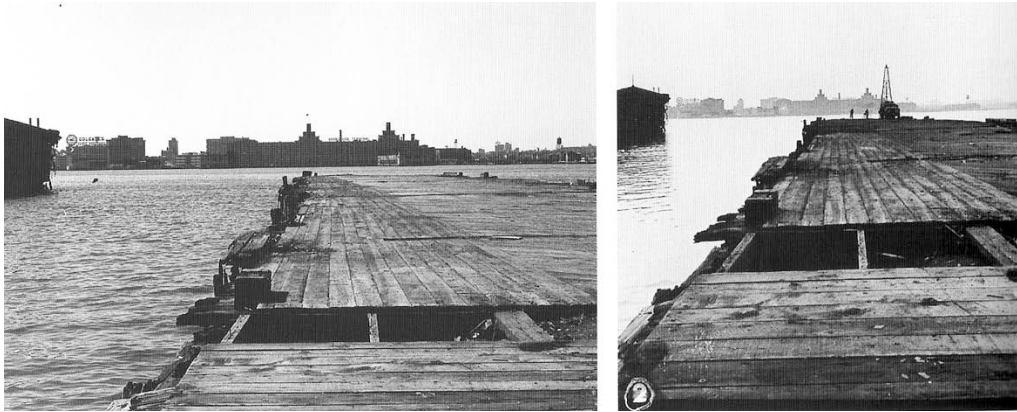


Fig.21. Douglas Huebler, *Location Piece Number 7*, (1971).

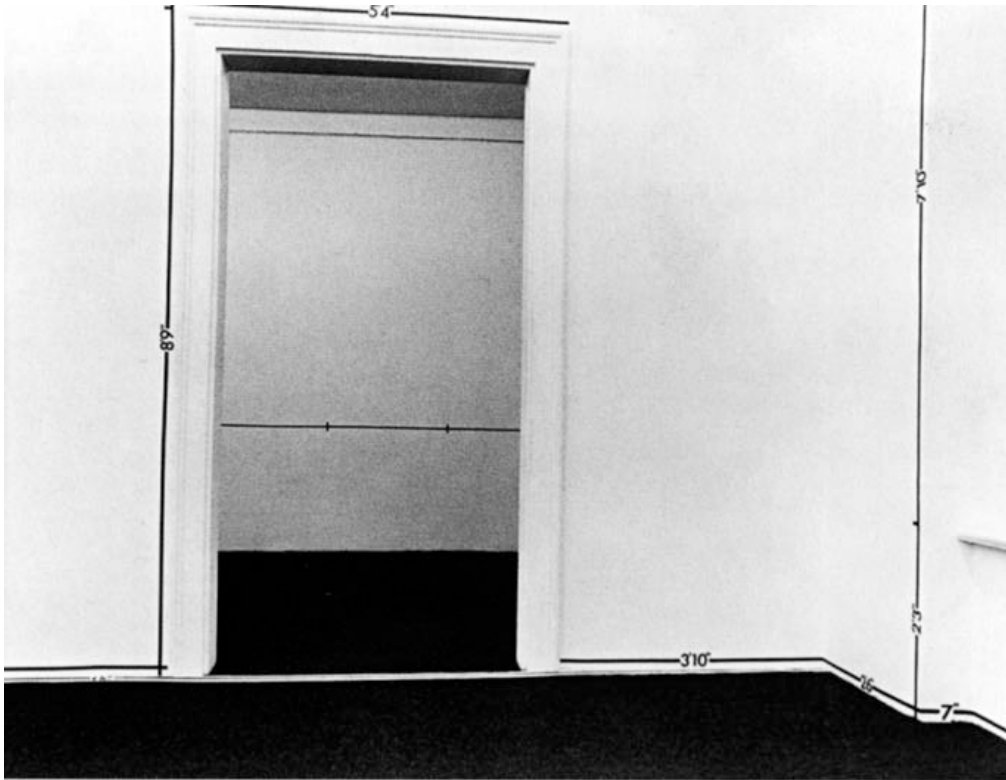


Fig.22. Mel Bochner, *Measurement Room* (1969).

clarified. *Gallery Goer's Birthplace and Residence Profile*, while prioritising the systematic ontology of the work above its material realisation (the profile must be filled in in order to become art), also began to articulate a (nascent) critique of the contextual character of artistic meaning (the profile depends on the gallery to be recognised as art). By revealing the restricted ethnic and socio-economic constitution of the gallery's audience base, Haacke suggested that the ontology of an artwork could not be defined without taking into account its social determination. Haacke *contextualised* art understood as a conceptual system. He treated the system as an expanded and updated form of the readymade—beyond a specific object and beyond determination by the immediate art institutional context alone: "If you work with real-time systems, well, you probably go beyond Duchamp's position. Real-time systems are double agents. They might run under the heading "art," but this culturalization does not prevent them from operating as normal."¹¹⁴ Huebler also shared a similar conception of the system as an expanded readymade: "A system existing in the world disinterested in the purposes of art may be 'plugged into' in such a way as to produce a work that possesses a separate existence and that neither changes nor comments on the system so used."¹¹⁵ Haacke's and Huebler's work moved away from the residually percept focused conceptual systems of Le Witt and Piper. This shift was marked by an increasing attention to the social context of art.

Mierle Lademan Ukeles' work offered a caveat to the system-as-readymade strategy while nonetheless employing it. Challenging Haacke and Huebler's claims that social systems could be neutrally appropriated without changing or

commenting on them, Mierle Lademan Ukeles insisted on the politics encoded in any such “appropriation.” In “Maintenance Art Manifesto: Proposal for an Exhibition, ‘CARE’ (1969),” Ukeles insisted on the hierarchy obtaining between the art system (understood within the broader category of social “development”) and other social sub-systems (understood within the broader category of social “maintenance”). Herein “development” was clearly privileged over “maintenance,” despite their interdependence:

Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight: show your work — show it again keep the contemporaryartmuseum groovy keep the home fires burning.

Development systems are partial feedback systems with major room for change.

Maintenance systems are direct feedback systems with little room for alteration...

*Conceptual & Process art, especially, claim pure development and change, yet employ almost purely maintenance processes.*¹¹⁶

Ukeles was later to realise her manifesto in works including *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (1973) [Fig. 19] and *I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day* (1976). In these works, Ukeles directly staged maintenance work as art. In so doing she produced a *reciprocal* version of the “systems” readymade, one which foregrounded the privileges accorded to art workers over and above other “social” workers.

However, a shift toward the (critical) consideration of art’s social context was not comprehensive. Even as a work such as *Photo-Electric* began to think the relation between art and (control) society, Haacke continued to experiment

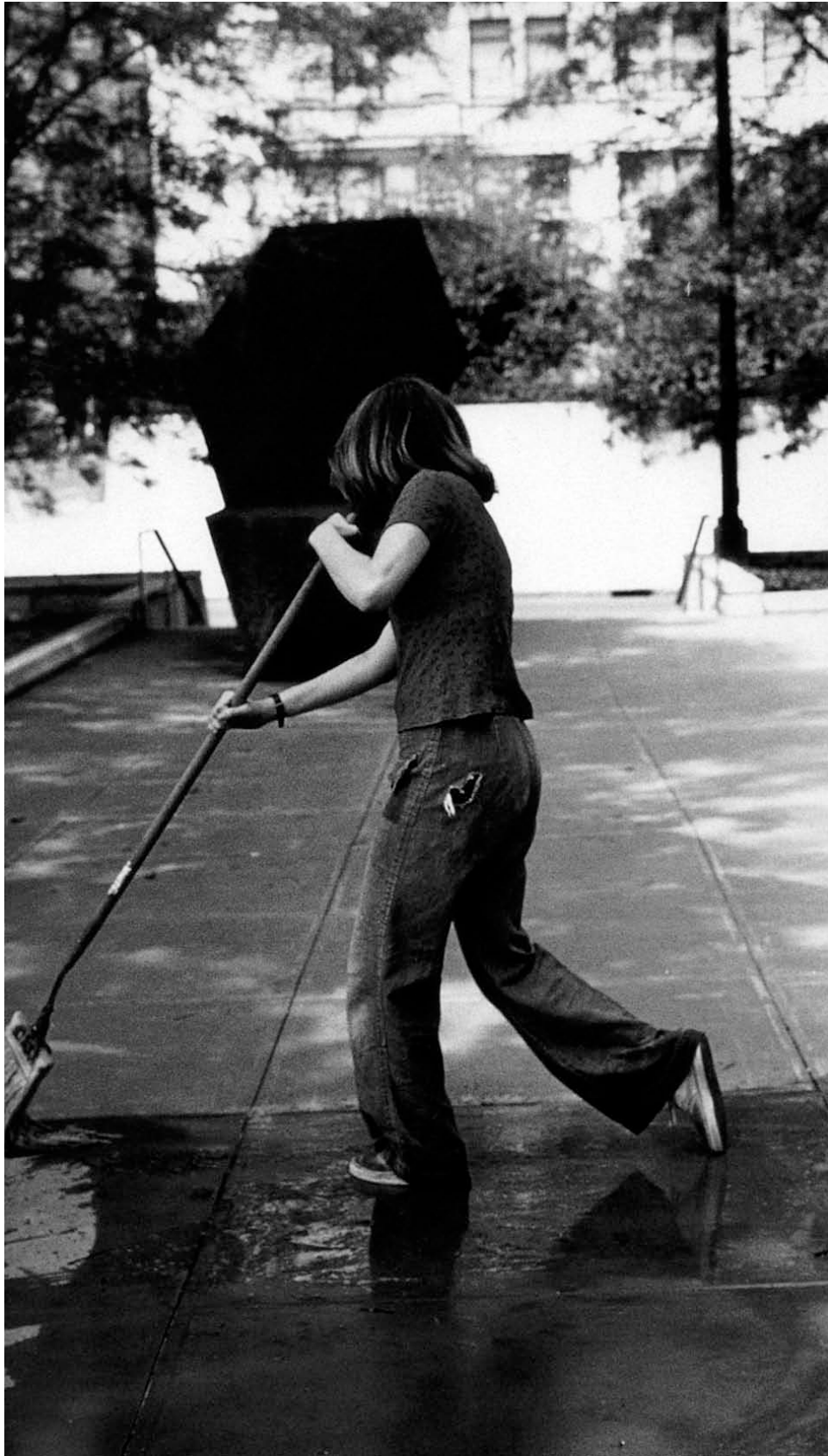


Fig. 23. Mierle Lademan Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside* (1973).

with physical and biological systems before coming to focus more concertedly on social systems. Nor did this shift toward the social stand as the uncontested ground of development for a properly “conceptual” art. It conflicted with forms of conceptual art characterised by the production of “imperceptible” artworks (artworks made from materials beyond the limits of unaided human sensory perception) and by the related, post-Duchampian strategy of nominating real-world places, situations, actions or contexts as artworks (principally undertaken by Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler and Lawrence Weiner), as well as with the (eventually) dominant, tendency toward construing the artwork’s ontology in analytical or linguistic terms (principally articulated, albeit with many disagreements, by Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language).¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the system stood as one of the first things that was conceptualised by the art of the late 1960s such that it became possible to speak of a “conceptual” art.

Limit Cases

Charles Harrison has noted that the “normal procedure” of art history is “to represent the art of the past as enabling the art of the present: we can understand the meaning and significance of the former, it is normally implied, insofar as its potential and its implications are discovered in the latter.”¹¹⁸ Stressing “explanation of the experience of failure or of misapprehension or of disappointment is not generally looked for in historical accounts,” Harrison, in contrast, seeks to proceed “without presuming that an adequate representation of the past can be achieved in terms of the prevailing ratifications of the present.”¹¹⁹ Yet, though he wishes to insist on a radical unrealised potential inhering within the past, Harrison’s historical account is still straightforwardly teleological (the settled “significance” of the art of the past is, or is not, available within the art of the present). What, though, if we were to insist that the art of the past is not straightforwardly settled, such that it can “enable”, or fail to enable, the art of the present? What if, on the contrary, the art of the present is always putting the art of the past in question, just as surely as the inverse is the case? Here, the relations between past and present art remain perpetually at stake, to be renegotiated as new circumstances demand. It is in this sense that the previously marginal historical category of systems art can appear with new vigour and urgency.

Even though the conclusions he draws are notoriously partisan, the criteria that Harrison has elaborated by means of which conceptual art “proper” might be distinguished from the more inclusive category of postformalism are less

sectarian and, consequently, more useful: “In the search for grounds on which to isolate a Conceptual Art tendency from both previous and concurrent developments, the significant indicator will be some characteristic form of difference in the disposition or activity predicated of the spectator and in the forms of matching or reference by means of which the work of art is distinguished.”¹²⁰

According to these criteria, *Photo-Electric* might be designated a work of conceptual art. First, by dramatically removing objects from the work altogether (the grid of infrared beams is invisible to the human eye) Haacke establishes a different form of “matching or reference by means of which the work of art is distinguished.” *Photo-Electric* takes away the specific object while retaining perhaps the principal achievement of the specific object, namely the phenomenological activation of the space of its display: “A “sculpture” that physically reacts to its environment and/or affects its surroundings is no longer to be regarded as an object. The range of outside factors influencing it, as well as its own radius of action, reach beyond the space it materially occupies. It thus merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a “system” of interdependent processes.”¹²¹ Second, Haacke incorporated the “viewer” of the work directly into its production (the “art” here does not meaningfully precede its actualisation by one or more interacting members of the public), thus establishing a “characteristic form of difference in the disposition or activity predicated of the spectator.” Without the interaction of the viewer, Haacke’s work is simply a black box.

It is with the realisation of the ineliminability of the aesthetic dimension of art attendant upon the market's recuperation of conceptual art as a "period style" that claims for a systematic conceptual art must be understood. Analytic conceptual art no longer looks so secure in its historical status (hence its limited influence on today's art). Yet one of the fundamental claims we have advanced here is that conceptual art is something more than a period style, that its recuperation is incomplete. Conceptual art, and more precisely systematic conceptual art, resists reduction to the status of a "style." Its critical force remains extant in its influence on artists making use of social systems in their work today, artists who understand art's ontology to be relationally or contextually determined. The unresolved problems of conceptual art thus continue to structure the field of advanced art. Historically, the shift from the use of aesthetic systems to generate artworks to the understanding of art as a conceptual system marked the transition from a more nebulous postformalist systems art to a demonstrably systematic mode of conceptual art.

4. Conceptual Art's Heterodox Modes

Indexing

Looking back on the art of the late Sixties and early Seventies Mary Kelly has described the way in which a “systemic approach to art” was pursued by herself and others, an approach that could be summarised by the formula “‘art interrogating the conditions of the object’ and then going to the second stage and interrogating the conditions of the interrogation itself...”¹ Produced in successive years, Haacke’s *Shapolsky et al.* (1971), Art & Language’s *Index 01* (1972) [Fig.24] and Mary Kelly, Kay Hunt and Margaret Harrison’s *Women and Work* (1973) [Fig.25], though sharing a certain visual affinity, stand as sharply differentiated markers in the development of conceptual art. Though all three could be described as employing a “systemic” approach, each represents a very different interpretation of what this means. *Women and Work* formulates a critique of *Shapolsky et al.* and *Index 01*, two works which themselves represent divergent approaches to a particular artistic problem, namely the challenge of defining the ontological ground of (autonomous) art after the collapse of formalist modernism.

The differences between these works can be understood by considering the differing ways in which they conceived the challenge of “interrogating the conditions of the interrogation” of postformalist art. Haacke’s *Shapolsky et al.*, embodied systematic self-reflexivity about the *sociological* grounds of advanced art production. Art & Language’s *Index 01* focused on systematic self-reflexivity about the discursive or, more strictly, the *philosophical* grounds of advanced art production (albeit with philosophy understood narrowly as Anglo-American Analytic philosophy).² Yet Kelly found fault with both approaches explaining



Fig.24. Art and Language, *Index 01* (1972).

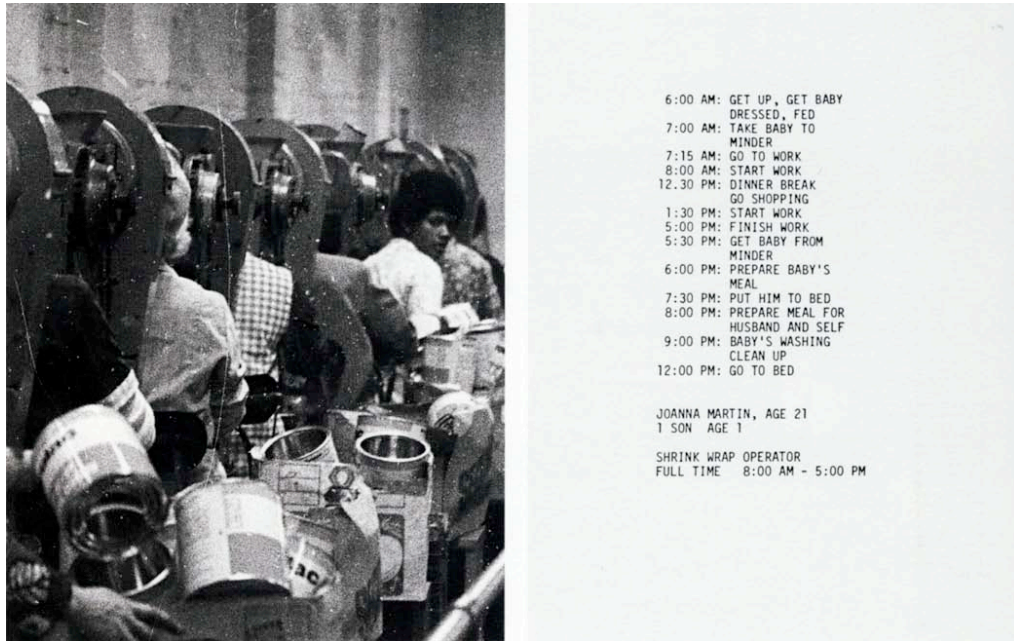


Fig.25. Mary Kelly, Kay Hunt and Margaret Harrison, *Women and Work* (1973).

that there was “something *very inadequate about the systemic approach to art*, something wrong with the formula ‘art interrogating the conditions of the object’ and then going to the second stage and interrogating the conditions of the interrogation itself, but refusing to include subjectivity or sexual difference in that interrogation.”³ Though admitting that she had been influenced by Haacke’s approach—“you can see the *Women and Work* project looks a lot like Haacke’s ‘Shapolsky’ piece”—Kelly also stressed her awareness that “something wasn’t working in the strategy” employed by *Women and Work*.⁴ Kelly describes *Women and Work* as “a document on the division of labour in a specific industry, showing the changes in the labour process and the constitution of the labour force during the implementation of the Equal Pay Act,” noting that in making the work she discovered “how the division of labour in industry was underpinned by the division of labour in the home and that the central issue for women was in fact reproduction.”⁵ For Kelly, however, the sociological approach of *Women & Work* failed to capture her subjects’ psychic investments in their social roles which was, for Kelly, both the cause of their social subjection *and* the site of their possibility for resistance. Art & Language also launched several polemics against what they perceived to be the “sociologism” of Haacke’s work, polemics which will be discussed in more detail below. Yet Kelly, who encountered *Index* in its second incarnation as *Index 02* in “The New Art” (1972) exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, was not persuaded that its philosophical self-reflexivity provided a more productive trajectory.⁶

Kelly's response to the perceived failings of the "systemic approach" was to begin to make work that included subjectivity and sexual difference in the "interrogation." The problems that Kelly discerned with *Women & Work* became the spur for her next major work, *Post-Partum Document* (1975) [Fig.26] "an on-going process of analysis and visualisation of the mother-child relationship."⁷ Peter Wollen has commented on the way in which *Post-Partum Document* was conceived and presented as an inter-subjective artwork, observing that it consisted of "the discourse of an artist who was also a woman, constituting herself inter-subjectively as a mother and collaborating in a work with her own infant child."⁸ *Women & Work* prompted Kelly's self-reflexivity about the *subjective* ontological grounds of art production.⁹

In her own account of her artistic development, Kelly has emphasised that the political upheavals of the late 1960s directly impacted the evolution of her work: "First of all, I was an artist making systems work without any political content, if you like. When the great upheavals of 1968 opened up areas of activism, none of us immediately responded at the level of our artwork. As Hans Haacke has said, for an interim period people just kept their art and their politics separate."¹⁰ Yet Kelly, as with Haacke, did not keep her art and her politics separate for long. As a contemporary reviewer remarked of the *Women & Work* show, "The work on display is the result of two years collaboration between women who share a common commitment to the women's liberation movement. Their project was to combine research on the sexual division of labour in industry with the techniques of informational art."¹¹ What the reviewer does not comment on is the link between the "division of labour in

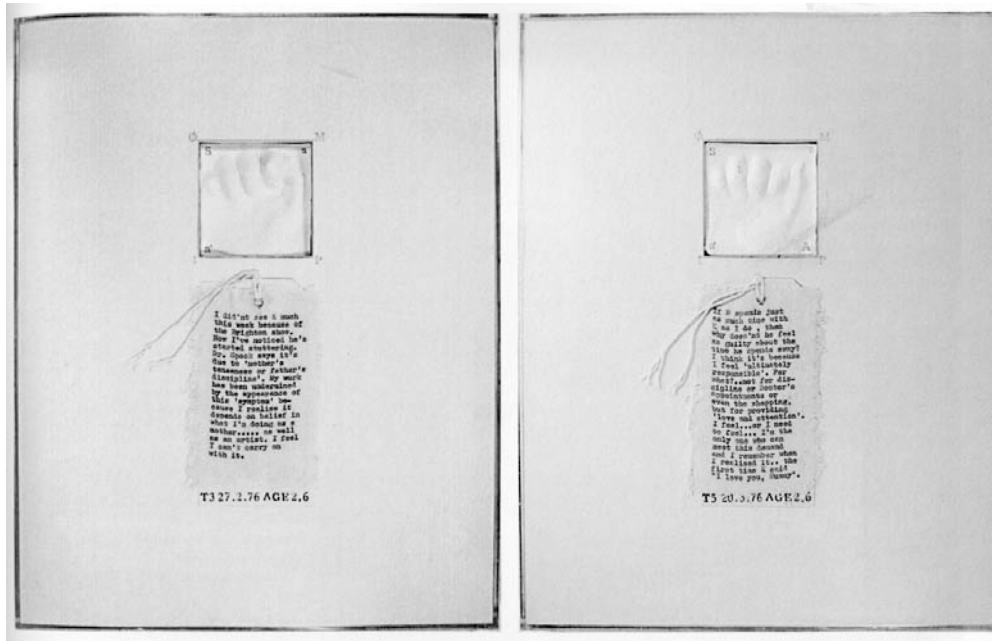


Fig.26. Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (1973).

industry” and the “techniques of informational art” – systems art indexed changes in the system of advanced industrial capitalism. Kelly’s *Women & Work* marked the late moment of a politicised systematic conceptual art. Yet it also initiated the beginning of the breakdown of “systems work” as a viable artistic methodology prior to the widespread turn to a set of post-conceptual practices. By expanding on the relations between Haacke’s *Shapolsky et al., Art & Language*’s *Index 01* and Kelly’s *Women & Work* we can track this development. In order to do so, we will be obliged to discriminate between different modes of conceptual art and to revisit their competing attempts to define, and in some cases to hegemonise, conceptual art practice.

Multiple Modes

Though usually abridged to a shorter form, the full title of Lucy Lippard's renowned conceptual art sourcebook runs *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia and Asia (with occasional political overtones)*. Rather than group work in strict identity, Lippard held different bodies of work together via a loose concatenation of categories. As she stated in the preface “this is a book about widely differing phenomena within a time span, not about a ‘movement’...”¹²

The fact that, even as late as 1973, Lippard was still referring to “so-called conceptual or information or idea art” indicates just how resistant this body of work was to conventional forms of art historical assimilation and categorisation. That “minimal” and “systems” art could also be grouped together as “vaguely designated areas” in 1973 is also surprising (the debates about minimalism at least were well-established by that date) but also indicates that systems art, though “vaguely designated,” was also perceived, at that time, to be of comparable standing to other postformalist practices such as anti-form, earth or process art – critical categories which have subsequently been subjected to considerably more art historical attention. The long-form title of Lippard's anthology reinforces the porosity of the boundaries between postformalist

practices. That the boundaries were porous, however, does not mean that they were not contested.

Charles Harrison has commented on the challenge that faced “normal art criticism and curatorship” when faced with the non-morphological approach of conceptual art “proper”: “One of the more interesting aspects of the best work was its critical disengagement from morphologically based concepts of style. Normal art criticism and curatorship tend to presuppose the security of such concepts for the purposes of grouping and demarcation. With this security undermined those slow on their feet were left grasping at straw categories, or listening anxiously for gossip with the ring of authority and authenticity about it.”¹³ Theorising the explosion of postformalist practices was the challenge presented by the breakdown of Greenbergian formalist aesthetics as the arbiter of advanced art. As discussed in chapter three, this was what led Jack Burnham to produce his theory of systems aesthetics: “The notion of a ‘Systems Esthetics’ appeared to have validity as momentum built up for Earth Art, Ecological Art, Body Art, Video Art, and the *multitudinous forms of Conceptualism*.”¹⁴ Yet as we also saw in the previous chapter, systems aesthetics failed as a unified theory of postformalist art. However, in pointing to the “multitudinous forms of conceptualism” Burnham, along with Lippard, drew attention to the fact that there were a wide variety of practices seeking to claim “conceptual” status.¹⁵ How then to disambiguate these “multitudinous forms” meaningfully?

Although Kelly considers her own early work alongside Haacke’s and Art & Language’s as examples of the “systemic” approach to art, such a claim reads

incongruously today. This is because of the divergent reception histories that these artists have been accorded: a questionable unanimity has been retrospectively projected on to their respective practices in order that their distinctiveness, even mutual exclusivity, can be “secured.” Haacke is normally taken to “stand for” institutional critique, Art & Language for analytic conceptual art and Kelly for the beginnings of identity politics. We will argue that such an approach misrepresents the complex relationship that obtained between these artistic practices.

Addressing these issues will involve reformulating our critical vocabulary. In 1972, the year in which conceptual art went mainstream at “Documenta V” becoming something like the agreed upon face of the international avant-garde and, in the process, peaking as a vital, creative and critical force, Lizzie Borden published an article on conceptual art in *Artforum*, explaining its “Three Modes” to the magazine’s readers.¹⁶ The substance of Borden’s article is no longer pertinent since she offered a loose definition of conceptual art and her three modes—“actions performed in the past and documented in the present;” “the body in space;” and “linguistic analysis”—are not persuasive.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Borden’s proposal that conceptual art could be qualified in terms of *modes* remains a suggestive one. Modes enable us to develop a more substantive account of conceptual art than an overarching “movement” designation. Modes of conceptual art have also been a feature of the critical literature on conceptual art since Kosuth’s made his infamous distinction between an endorsed “Theoretical Conceptual Art” and a derogated “Stylistic Conceptual Art.”¹⁸

A *mode*, as “a way or manner in which something is done or takes place” is distinguished from a *form*, as “the visual aspect, especially the shape or configuration, of a thing.”¹⁹ By using the term “mode” the sense that visual or morphological traits should be used to differentiate, or categorise a given artwork is played down. Instead the emphasis is placed on what the work does and how it functions. Bringing in a discussion of modes allows us to attempt to impart some organisation and conceptual distinction to the competing articulations of conceptual art – to disambiguate them to some degree and to give them greater critical specificity. Instead of “multitudinous forms of Conceptualism” we can instead begin to discriminate *multiple modes of conceptual art*. Doing so allows us to develop a more precise characterisation of conceptual art and thus to specify the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art more closely. Modes serve to emphasise the internal differences that existed within conceptual art as a result of the conflicts of self-understanding on the part of its most important practitioners. Significant debates play out between the multiple modes of conceptual art.

The persistence of morphological categories does not do justice to art after conceptual art, that is art that is defined by the *negation* of the artistic significance of morphological categories. Developments in art after conceptual art have not been best characterised in terms of “movements,” as is empirically attested by the dearth of contemporary examples. If anything, art is moving towards a situation where artistic ontology is established at the level of the individual artwork, with the basis of its claim to art status being determined at

the level of its relation to “Art,” with no mediating intervening categories such as medium, style, genre or, as is at stake here, movement. Art history, with its residual reliance on the interpretative category of the movement, has often failed to keep pace with the art that it aspires to historicise.

The modes of conceptual art are not however equivalent to the range of different terms originally proposed for it, e.g. “information” or “idea” or “post-object” art. These terms tended to propose, albeit in various different formulations, that a “dematerialised” art material acted as a replacement for the Judean specific object which had itself displaced the traditional media of painting and sculpture. These terms consequently failed to capture what was most pertinent about conceptual art, they remained focused on the first phase of conceptual art’s development (the interrogation of the conditions of the art *object*) at the expense of the second (the interrogation of the interrogation). It was only with the self-reflexive turn to the interrogation of the interrogation of the conditions of the art object that a fully recognisable conceptual art emerged and consequently it is at this level that differentiated “modes” of conceptual art should be distinguished.

What then are the modes of conceptual art? Without claiming to have generated an exhaustive classification, four significant modes of conceptual art can be schematised:

1. *Stylistic conceptual art*
2. *Analytic conceptual art*
3. *Systematic conceptual art*
4. *Synthetic conceptual art*

Developing Kosuth's position, we retain the opposition between a "stylistic" and a "theoretical" mode of conceptual art but argue that a theoretically informed conceptual art actually took the form of three distinct modes: analytic conceptual art; systematic conceptual art and synthetic conceptual art. Analytic conceptual art can be considered as broadly analogous to Kosuth's conception of theoretical conceptual art (although we will make important qualifications to this schematic definition based on interventions made by Art & Language UK). The self-reflexive turn in systems art produced a mode of systematic conceptual art emphasising the relation between art (understood as a conceptual system), the art system and the social system. Synthetic conceptual art was a term defined by Mary Kelly and which insisted on the subjective ontological grounds of art that she found lacking in the "systemic" approach. Here we need to mark the fact that Kelly's definition of synthetic conceptual art relies on a contentious definition of the "synthetic proposition," an issue that will be discussed later in the chapter. Nevertheless Kelly's identification of a synthetic mode of conceptual art will be shown to have a certain historical force, explaining its

adoption here. The interrelation and competition between these modes can be used to characterise the way in which conceptual art plays out as a “movement.”

Analytic Conceptual Art and the Quest for Orthodoxy

In his essay “Conceptual art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” Benjamin Buchloh makes an odd argumentative move. Initially he clearly states “the proposal inherent in Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as analytic proposition).” Yet in the next paragraph, he observes that conceptual art consisted of a “complex range of mutually opposed approaches” and that “precisely because of this range of implications of Conceptual Art, it would seem imperative to resist a construction of its history in terms of a stylistic homogenization, which would limit that history to a group of individuals and a set of strictly defined practices and historical interventions (such as, for example, the activities initiated by Seth Siegelaub in New York in 1968 or the authoritarian quests for orthodoxy by the English Art & Language group).”²⁰

Buchloh’s argument, one that has been perhaps the single most influential work of scholarship on conceptual art, is thus puzzling in a major regard. He asserts that it is “imperative to resist” a construction of conceptual art based on a specific set of historical interventions immediately after doing exactly that himself since it is precisely Joseph Kosuth and Art & Language who are strongly associated with the definition of conceptual art as “the work as analytic proposition.” It was not a definition of conceptual art shared by, for example, Sol Le Witt: “Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artists may use any form, from an expression of words, (written or spoken) to physical

reality, equally.”²¹ If anything, it is Buchloh’s article that has taken on the status of orthodoxy. Certainly, as we saw in chapter one, it is with Buchloh’s argument that most historians and critics of conceptual art have taken issue, from Kosuth and Siegelau, through Jeff Wall and on to the present generation of scholarship.

The participants in these debates would not deny that conceptual art was riven by intense, frequently acrimonious, internal debate. What has been contested is the claim Art & Language staged explicit “quests for orthodoxy.”²² Charles Harrison observes that “Conceptual Art was necessarily ad hoc, syndicalist, dialogical and inquisitive.”²³ Art & Language, in the early issues of their *Art-Language* journal at least, sought to stage encounters between interested parties with different views about what (conceptual) art was or might be. *Art-Language* staged an intensive series of debates about what constituted an artwork, and these were discussions that tended to polarise viewpoints. Outlining their approach in the first *Art-Language* editorial, they clearly stated: “The essay will point out some differences in an indirect way between American and British Conceptual art, but it should not be seen to indicate a clear and definite boundary between them.”²⁴ Making good on such claims, the first issue contained Sol LeWitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” (an extension of his earlier “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”), Dan Graham’s *Poem-schema* and Lawrence Weiner’s *Statements* alongside the various “Notes on M1” by David Bainbridge and Michael Baldwin.

Instead of approaching the various debates in conceptual art principally through individual artists we will instead pursue them through the interaction of the different “modes” of conceptual art set out above. The advantage of this approach is that it does not artificially restrict specific artists to invariant positions—artists moved between modes and from earlier, more didactic positions to later, less didactic ones. Here Kosuth is exemplary. Frequently caricatured as the most intransigent of the conceptual artists his position regarding his own work did change over time, as he has admitted: “The ‘demystification’ of early conceptualism collapsed into style because of the naiveté of its scientific, *instrumental*, tools. Located in the trajectory of an architectonic model, it couldn’t *see itself*; it internalized its belief in the ‘progress’ of science and modernism.”²⁵ Rather than the forced opposition of individual artists or groups of artists—the British versus the Americans, the Siegel and Stable versus Art & Language (an opposition which is obliged to pass over Joseph Kosuth’s more complex mediating role between the two “camps” despite his eventual expulsion from the latter)—we can instead look at the tensions between the different modes of articulation of conceptual art, modes which coincide with different phases of different artists’ individual practice. Such an approach does not, however, prevent us from strongly associating certain artists with a particular mode of conceptual art. As has been discussed, particular artistic practices instantiate the distinct modes.

Taking such an approach, we can make finer discriminations than Buchloh’s overly simplified contention that “Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as

analytic proposition)” will allow.²⁶ By so doing, we observe that the relative priority accorded to the different modes of conceptual art shifts over time, as conceptual art itself emerges, consolidates and declines as a coherent project. Before considering analytic conceptual art's relation to systematic conceptual art it is important to clarify in greater detail exactly how art historians have been able to speak of a strictly linguistic, analytic conceptual art. What was analytic conceptual art, how did it come to be, and why did it predominate? For if analytic conceptual art is considered to be the critically hegemonic version of conceptual art against which alternate claims on the name are obliged to articulate themselves, then it is imperative that we revisit its construction as a critical category, or, in the terms that we have outlined here, a mode of conceptual art.

Analytic conceptual art was largely a product of the hardening of the debates, and deepening of the tensions, that occurred within and around the *Art-Language* journal. These debates were predominantly conducted between Joseph Kosuth and the various individuals making up the English and American Art & Language collectives (ALUK and ALNY respectively), but also drew in Sol LeWitt, Victor Burgin and Adrian Piper, among others. Notoriously, the outcome of these debates resulted in deep factionalisation and the splintering of ALNY from ALUK with the foundation of *The Fox* in 1975 (a journal that was itself subject to rapid and terminal factionalisation).²⁷

It is with Kosuth that any account of analytic conceptual art is obliged to start. Though it is typically through a reading of his 1969 essay “Art after

Philosophy” (published in three parts in successive volumes of *Studio International*) we will focus on his first contribution to *Art-Language*, the “Introductory Note by the American Editor” (1970) in the second issue of the journal.²⁸ This introductory note is shorter and more strongly argued than “Art After Philosophy.” Kosuth’s remarks in the “Introductory Note” can be simply summarised. Here Kosuth schematised the entire field of “current American art activity” into three categories—aesthetic, reactive and conceptual—and then proceeded to elaborate definitions of these categories. Thus “aesthetic art” was defined as that which adhered to the orthodox Greenbergian account of art (and which Kosuth objected to precisely because, in such a conception, “the artist” was “omitted from the ‘art activity’ in that he or she was considered merely “the carpenter of the predicate” and thus was not held to “take part in the conceptual engagement.”²⁹ “Reactive art” was a loose category, catching almost every postformalist tendency falling between formalist modernism and conceptual art: “What this art attempts is to refer to a traditional notion of art while still being ‘avant-garde’. One support is placed in the material (sculpture) and/or visual (painting) arena, enough to maintain the historical continuum while the other is left to roam about for new ‘moves’ to make and further ‘breakthroughs’ to accomplish.”³⁰ Finally, “Conceptual art” at its most “strict and radical extreme” was defined by Kosuth as being “based on an inquiry into the nature of art” and was consequently “not just the activity of constructing art propositions, but a working out, a thinking out, of *all implications of all aspects of the concept ‘art’*.”³¹

Having offered his definition of conceptual art, Kosuth proceeded to add three important qualifications to it. First, he suggested that conceptual art no longer required an audience other than that of its participant observers (because art no longer contained any aspect of “entertainment”), nor a mediating critic (since the distinction between perception and conception, art and criticism had dissolved). Second, Kosuth asserted that art had to be thought linguistically “Fundamental to this idea of art is the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art propositions, be they past or present, and regardless of the elements used in their construction.”³² Third, Kosuth claimed that the “strict and radical” conception that he proposed was the only one that could be designated conceptual art “proper” because it was the point at which American and British conceptual artists were purportedly in agreement.

In one short editorial, Kosuth both reemphasised and hardened the claims that he had made in “Art After Philosophy.” He stressed the linguistic nature of all (conceptual) art propositions; attempted to dispense with any consideration of art’s relation to its actually existing social and institutional context (the “artist-critic-audience” system); and moved to reduce the range of application of the term conceptual art. In “Art After Philosophy” Kosuth had been prepared to acknowledge the work, or at least elements of the work, of a number of artists as conceptual: Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, Christine Kozlov, Iain Baxter, James Byars, Frederic Barthelme, Bernar Venet, Hanne Darboven, Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman, Barry Flanagan, Bruce McLean, Richard Long, Steven Kaltenbach, Ian Wilson, Mel Bochner, Jan Dibbets, Eric Orr, Allen Ruppersberg, Dennis Oppenheim, Donald Burgy, Saul Ostrow, Adrian Piper,

Perpetua Butler, Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, Roger Cutforth. In the “Introductory Note,” however, he narrowed his scope: “this concept of American ‘conceptual’ art is, I admit, here defined by my own characterisation.”³³ The “Introductory Note” might then legitimately be described as the outlines of a Kosuthian quest for orthodoxy.

There are, however, several problems with Kosuth’s claims, claims that ultimately resulted in tension between Kosuth and the British conceptual artists with whom, at this stage, he proclaimed himself to be in agreement. These tensions undermined Kosuth’s ability to produce an “orthodox” or “pure” analytic conceptual art. His claims proved susceptible not only to internal critique but also to the demonstration that his own “strict and radical” conception of conceptual art was not ultimately compatible with the work of ALUK. Regarding its susceptibility to internal critique, Peter Osborne has summarised the “three main components of Kosuth’s conception” of conceptual art as “*linguistic reduction, psychologism, and the collapse of the distinction between art and criticism.*”³⁴ Osborne has also advanced a persuasive critique of these three claims whereby he demonstrates that Kosuth’s linguistic reduction amounts to an “aestheticization of logical positivism,” that his psychologism was a misguided version of the fallacy of artistic intentionalism, and that the collapse of the art/criticism distinction was obviated by the fact that Kosuth continued “to produce object-instantiated work as the means for the communication of his propositions.”³⁵

Examining the shared concerns of ALUK and Kosuth it quickly becomes clear that their positions diverged, even at their ostensible point of solidarity. Charles Harrison has described the evolution of the term conceptual art in light of its exhibition history: “During the earliest... exhibitions ‘Conceptual Art’ was merely one designation among many tried on in reference to a broad and various international avant-garde... By 1970 a number of critics and curators – the present author among them – were staging shows specifically addressed to ‘Conceptual Art’... “³⁶ Though we can agree with the broad trajectory Harrison describes, too much is elided in his claim that: “Within the wider groupings of the avant-garde then, Conceptual Art was distinguished by the relative absence of physically robust material and by the recourse to linguistic specification and description which that absence entailed...”³⁷ It is the “and” that is most problematic here, running together as it does different modes of conceptual art. By means of such a description, self-admittedly an “approximate characterization,” Harrison attempts to restrict his definition such that it excludes “enterprises such as interventions in the landscape, or installations or markings upon the body which... depend for their effects on some first-order physical characteristics” but still includes work such as the conceptual paintings of Atkinson and Baldwin and the nomination works of Robert Barry.³⁸

Yet for Harrison, assimilated to Art & Language as official historian and often guilty of running together the history of Art & Language with the history of conceptual art, it remains the case that conceptual art and linguistic specification are logically determined correlates, the “recourse to linguistic”

specification is read as the *logical* result of the deprivileging of materials and object status. Elsewhere he is even more specific: “The ‘crisis of the object’ supposed to have occurred during the 1960s might more appropriately be thought as a crisis in the critical relations between ‘art’ and ‘language’ – a crisis brought about by the collapse of those protocols that had previously served to keep the two apart.”³⁹

Harrison is too summary here. If we look again at the editorial from the first issue of *Art-Language*, (a text which looks back over the early, pre-journal, history of the group) we find significantly more diverse opinions on view as to what conceptual art involved as far as its practitioners were concerned. Given that the journal was one of the principle sites where the contest for the proper name of conceptual art was staged it seems appropriate to revisit its pages. It is clear that this contest was not as narrowly conceived within the journal (at least initially) as it has been in its retrospective accounting. Indeed, an earlier historical account of Art & Language by Harrison himself is more at ease with the artistic differences within the group: “Inevitably there have been anomalies within the workings of Art-Language itself, within the relationship between the journal... and the other work of its contributors... within different positions taken by different contributors at the same time or the same contributors at different times. Consistency is not, however, what one necessarily strives for in a context of theoretical discourse to which there are several contributors. Something more like ‘defensibility’ is what one might aim at...”⁴⁰

The editorial of the first issue of *Art-Language* featured an in-depth discussion of *Crane* (1966), a work extending the consequences of Duchamp's contextual investigation of the readymade. Designated a "Made-made" by Bainbridge and Atkinson, the work involved a reversal/extension of the Duchampian readymade strategy: a crane, manufactured within the art context of St Martin's College, was de-designated as art and put into direct practical use.⁴¹ Subsequently it was re-designated as both crane and art object. Here then, there was clearly an interest in object status and institutional contextualisation that are not features of the linguistic restriction of conceptual art.⁴² Similarly, the editorial discussed another early project, the "Air Show" (1967) [Fig.27], a series of hypothetical exhibitions involving "a series of assertions concerning a theoretical usage of a column of air comprising a base of one square mile and of unspecified distance in the vertical dimension."⁴³ Here, the concerns were with nomination and the spatial boundaries of a possible/theoretical art object.

Reflecting on the usage of writing as the "object" upon which the "Air Show" was formulated, the editors observed that it became possible to see how such a deployment of writing opened up additional possibilities: "having gained the use of such a wide ranging instrument as 'straight' writing, then objects, concrete and theoretical, are only two types of entity which can count, a whole range of other types of entities become candidates for art usage."⁴⁴ This can be seen as the founding insight for the development of a "linguistic" conceptual art, as Harrison has acknowledged: "Kosuth and the British artists' work had developed independently since 1966 to a position of obvious compatibility. In particular the interest in linguistic analysis shared by Atkinson, Baldwin and

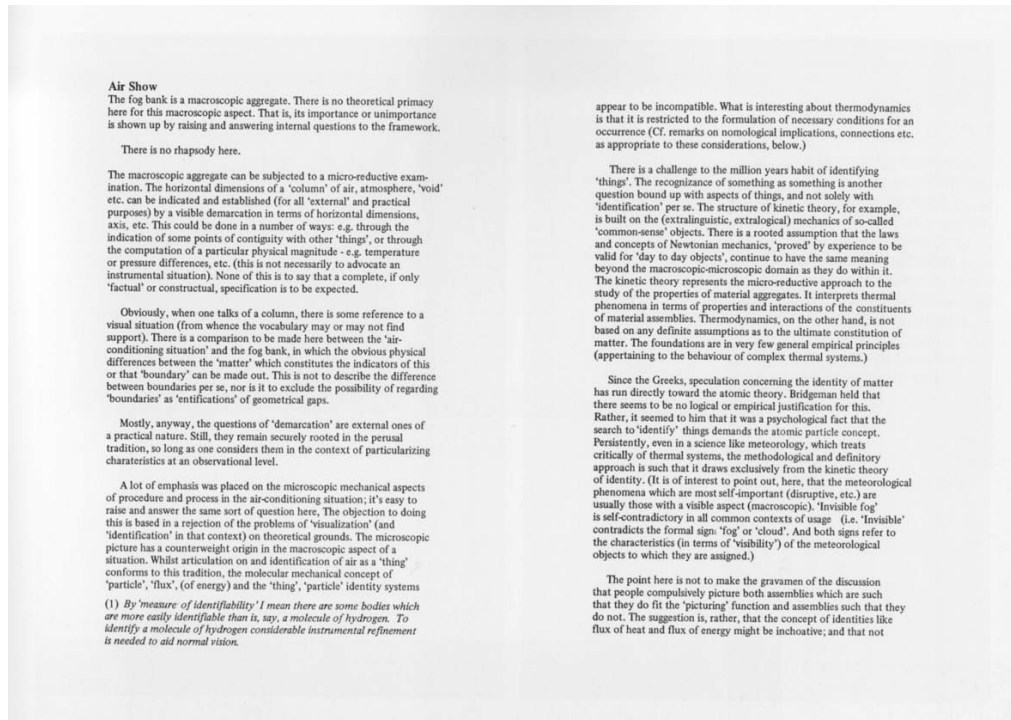


Fig.27. Terry Atkinson, *Air Show* (1976).

Kosuth both distinguished them from other artists in the late sixties and prepared considerable common ground between them.”⁴⁵

However, that writing presented itself as a *candidate* for art usage did not indicate that it should be advanced as the *exclusive* art entity and in the early (and later) stages of Art & Language's practice it was not taken as such. Notwithstanding the shared interest in “linguistic analysis” Harrison has recognised as much:

The fruits of the Art & Language project in the years 1968-72 were inchoate, obscure and occasionally paranoid. Insight alternated with irony, embarrassment and bathos – often in the same particle. No coherent or consistent aesthetic system could be wheeled on to demarcate between various forms of production: for instance, between such forms of display as machines, prints, diagrams and posters, and such forms of texts as essays, ‘proceedings,’ transcripts and jottings. Strategies were adopted and defeated.⁴⁶

The anomalous character of Art & Language's practice can be seen in Harrison's own “Idea Structures” exhibition at the Camden Art Centre in 1970. Conceived by Harrison as a corrective Harald Szeeman's more broadly focused exhibition “When Attitudes Become Form” (1969), “Idea Structures” was intended to showcase conceptual art “proper”, that is the kind of art that Harrison sought to champion.⁴⁷ Yet noting his inclusion of Bainbridge and Hurrell's *Lecher System* within the show suggests the less clear-cut developmental arc of Art & Language's work, revealing an involvement with cybernetics that once linked even Art & Language's “purist” project to other modes of conceptual art.

Looking back on this period, ALUK have refused the idea that conceptual art ultimately constituted a linguistic reduction: "Conceptual art does not correspond *tout court* to some sort of linguistic turn in artistic practice. It does represent an appropriation of certain dialogic and discursive mechanisms by artists who sought thereby to empower themselves and others, and to that limited extent it represents a linguistic turn. But Conceptual Art did not reduce (or attempt to reduce) the pictorial to the linguistic (or textual)."⁴⁸ Mel Ramsden has put it even more directly: "Conceptual Art doesn't have to do with words on walls. It's about finding alternatives for critical inquiry and it's about a sense of corrosive irony."⁴⁹

In the same issue of *Art-Language* as Kosuth's "Introductory note," Terry Atkinson's "From an Art & Language Point of View" set out to "point out some of the inconsistencies which the Art-Language artists feel to be involved in much recent work."⁵⁰ Here Atkinson seemed to present Kosuth's work as in (moderated) solidarity with ALUK's: "Kosuth's view, despite obvious shortcomings which he (Kosuth) has pointed out to me with respect to these articles is very much the view of the rest of the Art and Language artists."⁵¹ However, within the course of the essay it becomes clear that Atkinson's, and by extension ALUK's, conception of analytic conceptual art diverged from Kosuth's.

Such a conflict was anticipated in Atkinson's original 1970 definition of the "analytic approach" taken by conceptual art. For Atkinson, "analytic" named a much broader relation between conceptual art and (British) *analytic philosophy*, in

contrast to Kosuth's more restricted reading of "pure" conceptual art as an art of the analytic proposition: "The analytic approach I am pressing as being in some ways, commensurate with the British philosophic method, and this latter term only holds out in contrast to the Continental philosophers."⁵² He also stated: "Those following the tendency which I have attempted to hold out as analogous in some ways, to what I have called British Philosophical method, I have chosen to call here analytical."⁵³

Atkinson proceeded to develop an analogy between analytic and continental philosophy and UK and US conceptual art. Here he revealed anxieties about how to locate Kosuth in relation to the division between US and UK conceptual art, noting that although the fact that Kosuth was based in New York had led him to be "seen as an integral member of the Siegelau stable" nevertheless "it seems his natural tendency is toward the more analytic approach."⁵⁴ The battle for Kosuth's artistic soul can be read as an indication of the stakes at play in the attempt to define conceptual art.

Atkinson understood "Existentialism" to be a synonym for Continental philosophy and defined it thus: "Existentialism has its roots in German Romanticism, which was a protest in the name of individuality against the rationality of 18th century enlightenment... Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were opposed systematically to systematic philosophy, existentialism in many of its forms is anti-philosophical."⁵⁵ Atkinson concluded that "The contrast between the Siegelau stable and the Art & Language stable might be viewed to some extent in the light of the above. Barry, Weiner, et al, seem to generally

look toward the more ethico-mystical sector, the Art and Language artists place their methodological emphasis upon the analytic approach.”⁵⁶

Unpacking these claims a little, we can restate Atkinson's self-proclaimed “analytic-existential dichotomy analogy” as a broad claim that British (but not exclusively British) conceptual art, *like* British (but not exclusively British) Analytic Philosophy, was more systematic, and therefore more rigorous, than American “ethico-mystical” conceptual art, which was similar to Existentialism in its anti-systematic impetus.

Philosophically this is highly problematic: Existentialism cannot be used as a synonym for Continental Philosophy; Logical Positivism (Atkinson's model for British analytic Philosophy) was as opposed to systematic philosophy as Existentialism had been (albeit on opposed grounds); Existentialism was not “mystical.” Given the level of philosophical crudity demonstrated by Atkinson here we are obliged to note the problematic character of his analogy. Nevertheless, we can also assert that analytic conceptual art constituted a mode of conceptual art that *conceived of itself* along the lines of a rigorous, rational and philosophical investigation of the concept of art, by art. That “Continental Philosophy” was understood so crudely also helps explain the reasons why modernism was also understood so narrowly (as Greenbergian formalism), a reading that contact with the more substantive European aesthetic tradition (as mediated by Marcuse, for example) would have challenged.

Ultimately, despite its manifest failings as an account of philosophy, Atkinson's broad definition of analytic conceptual art as the critical artistic investigation of art's ontology undertaken in the manner of Anglophone analytic philosophy is more useful than Kosuth's. It is more flexible than Kosuth's narrower definition of the work of art as analytic proposition.⁵⁷ As Osborne has noted, "unlike Kosuth, Art & Language appreciated the open character of philosophical enquiry as an *ongoing task*."⁵⁸

Systematic Conceptual Art and Politics

The tensions between Joseph Kosuth and ALUK within the analytic mode of conceptual art regarding its self-understanding are, however, less significant for our argument than earlier tensions within Art & Language before the analytic mode of conceptual art came to be settled upon. For in the same issue that Kosuth and Atkinson offered their respective definitions and clarifications of analytic conceptual art, we also find extensive discussion of early ALUK projects that do not obviously fit this model. Rather, they share some of the concerns of systematic conceptual art.

In “Concerning Interpretation of the Bainbridge/Hurrell Models,” Terry Atkinson referred back to two works produced by other members of ALUK, David Bainbridge’s *M1 model* (including the various “Notes on M1” published in the first issue of *Art-Language*) and Howard Hurrell’s *Fluidic Model*.⁵⁹ He proceeded to offer a proto-critique of both: “To put the point somewhat aggressively, with Bainbridge/Hurrell the shift of emphasis is toward art producing engineering rather than engineering producing art. Whether such a policy can be developed into a *prima facie* instrument in expanding the concept of visual-art rather than simply expanding the types and range of objects produced for a static evaluative framework remains to be seen.”⁶⁰ For Atkinson, Bainbridge and Hurrell’s work fell within the tradition of kinetic art (though it aimed to extend its claims) and, as a direct result of this genealogy, and its concomitant attachment to engineering (a discipline which would seem to preordain the realisation of material works), risked simply producing more

objects in the world without doing any analytic work on the concept of art. Atkinson implicitly associated Bainbridge and Hurrell's work with the systematic conceptual art emerging, predominantly in the US, from a negotiated relation between tech art, minimalism and pop.

Hurrell's defence of his position is revealing and opens up the debate. Initially, he asserted that his and Bainbridge's work should be understood in relation to cybernetic, rather than kinetic, art: "M1 and Fluidic Device have more in common with cybernetic objects than with kinetic objects, though this does not invalidate Atkinson's comments... Cybernetic works can be considered to differ from kinetic works in that the system employed in the latter is 'closed' to information... whereas the system employed in the former is 'open' in this respect."⁶¹ He also objected "Cybernetic Art propositions are not about objects (or appearances) but processes."⁶² Hurrell argued that the cybernetic art object's openness to sensory input differentiated it strongly, along with its openness to time and change, from conventional art objects and therefore constituted a genuine development of the concept of art. Furthermore, Hurrell insisted, "Fluidic Device serves particularly to draw attention to the importance of the unimportance of 'working' as a prime requirement in Cybernetic Art propositions."⁶³

By insisting on the acceptability of "redundancy" in and for the cybernetic art object, Hurrell sought to distance his conception of cybernetic art from the *sons et lumières* spectacles of artists such as Nicholas Schöffer. Bainbridge and Hurrell had been exploring cybernetic work from their earliest "Hardware" (1967)

show at the Architectural Association and had consistently worked to minimise any sense of the spectacular. Rather, they asserted that their use of engineering was *analogical* to other Art & Language members' use of analytic philosophy: "There is a sense in which, for us engineering operations and referential discourse has served as analogical source material; the process of differentiating this material has worked analogically with differentiating art material as source material."⁶⁴ He continued, "The point is that one respect's one's analogues and their inherent limitations but one is not offering the source's attributes per se to be marvelled at."⁶⁵ For Hurrell, there was no difference between "engineering operations" and "referential discourse" as analytical tools for exploring the concept of art. He made this point even more explicitly in a second article in the journal, "Sculptures and Devices," immediately following on from the first. In reference to *Fluidic Device* Hurrell claimed that the work was "*analytic throughout*."⁶⁶ In this sense, Hurrell assimilated his and Bainbridge's practice to the analytic mode of conceptual art. Atkinson was sceptical of granting "analytic" status to their work precisely because of a general scepticism toward technology as a viable resource for making advanced art: "art tells technology what to do, technology does not make art."⁶⁷

For Atkinson, conceptual art had moved on from the simple interrogation of the (art) object (of formalist modernism), a practice associated with various postformalist tendencies and decisively embarked on an interrogation of the interrogation of the (art) object (of formalist modernism), a project unique to analytic conceptual art "proper". For Hurrell, in contrast, engineering could be used as "analogical source material" for such an interrogation of the

interrogation, and still be understood as an analytic practice. Charles Harrison acknowledges as much by grouping all of the artists together as analytic: “The analytic tendency in the work of Atkinson, Bainbridge, Baldwin, Hurrell and Kosuth has been justifiably seen – particularly since the publication of the second part of Kosuth’s ‘Art After Philosophy’ and of Atkinson’s ‘From an Art & Language Point of View’... to be directly at odds with, and antipathetic to, the more picaresque, whimsical and extravagant forms of ‘conceptual’, ‘dematerialised’ or ‘post-object’ art.”⁶⁸

As we have seen, in terms of the later history of Art & Language, a more restrictive view of what constituted an analytic practice was to prevail. Art ontological questions would be viewed through the lens of Anglophone analytic philosophy, and therefore in logico-linguistic terms:

The nature of the claims made and criteria considered relevant within Art-Language is generally pretty distinct from the more ‘conventional’ claims and criteria upheld in art now. One is concerned, above all, to establish some kind of common-sense ontology without at the same time making ontological commitments that are simple minded. This may sometimes lead to something like lack of tolerance. The kinds of tools of criticism developed within the essentially British tradition of analytic philosophy have proved useful in this context.⁶⁹

However, as we have also seen, in its earliest phases, members of the group were also interested in engineering and cybernetics as practices that could be used to investigate (quite practically) the ontology of art. This had once been acknowledged by Harrison (at this time not exclusively privileging analytic philosophy) as a case of art profitably opening itself to external discourses: “One of the consequences of questioning the hermetic status of the art object has been to open the ideology of art once again, after at least two decades of

academicism (i.e. of self-conscious absorption in essentially formal problems), to the influx of ideas and information from other disciplines.”⁷⁰ Harrison gave the example of Thomas Kuhn as one example within Art & Language’s own practice “of the fruitful employment of an influential heuristic from an area of controversy outside art.”⁷¹ More recently Harrison reneged on his earlier optimism with regard to the “fruitfulness” of the strategy:

Here perhaps was a solution to the problem of art’s apparent loss of its traditional media... All that was needed was for artists to reconceive themselves as kinds of radical systems analysts within the institutions of the art-world... by the early 1970s it was already quite possible to conceive of art in terms of a systems-based interface with science, or technology, or economics or whatever. That model has had a long life... The assumption at work in such enterprises, of course, is that the relevant artistic purpose is virtuously oppositional... the career of the systems interventionist is sustained by a romantic view of the artistic individual – as someone significantly free of institutionalisation.⁷²

The development of recognisable modes of conceptual art can in fact be clarified in terms of the relation that each of these modes took to other disciplines and the way in which these disciplines were used to offer an ontological ground for art that could no longer be (or was perceived to no longer be able to be) grounded aesthetically. Thus we see a number of statements following the form of the definition “Art is x” or of the analogy “Art is like x.” Art is (like) information; art is (like) an analytic proposition; art is (like) process. However, confusion between analogy thinking and identity-thinking also produced theoretical problems in the reconceptualisation of art. Kosuth’s attempt to think the analogy “art is like an analytic proposition” collapsed into the inaccurate and restrictive claim that “art is an analytic proposition.”

Despite some of its own founding members having been involved with cybernetics, analytic conceptual art practice became increasingly hardened *against* the contribution to be made by discourses “from other disciplines” which did not happen to be analytic philosophy. Such a hardening of artistic position can be traced in ALUK’s relationship to other conceptual artists, artists who were prepared to experiment with a broader array of conceptual systems. In this way the distinction and tension between analytical conceptual art and systematic conceptual art became manifest.

If analytic conceptual art succeeded in debarring everything except analytic philosophy as its legitimating discourse then systematic conceptual art’s legitimating discourse must be thought in the plural, as a series of legitimating discourses employed by different practitioners at different stage of their careers and in different (and admittedly not always theoretically compatible) combinations: Systems Theory; Cybernetics; Information Theory; Sociology; and (Marcusean) Critical Theory. In contrast, stylistic conceptual art, a purely pejorative category that no artist actually laid claim to, had no legitimating discourse (remaining unwittingly formalist) whereas synthetic conceptual art, in its determination to “include subjectivity in the interrogation” and to “refer to things outside itself” became concerned with Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Semiotics.

We can now specify in greater detail the characteristics of the different modes of conceptual art, tabulating the result:

<u>Mode of conceptual art</u>	<u>Legitimizing discourse</u>
<i>Stylistic conceptual art</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Analytic conceptual art</i>	<i>Analytic philosophy</i>
<i>Systematic conceptual art</i>	<i>Systems Theory; Information Theory; Cybernetics; Sociology; Critical Theory</i>
<i>Synthetic conceptual art</i>	<i>Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Semiotics</i>

Analytic conceptual art found fault with systematic conceptual art's self-reflexive relation to other social systems. The accusation was that, in self-reflexively relating to other social systems, art itself was collapsed into or made coterminous with these systems, ceding its autonomy as art. This issue became particularly pointed during the so-called "political turn" within Sixties art practice prompted by the Vietnam War.⁷³ Many artists, Hans Haacke, Mierle Lademan Ukeles, and Mary Kelly among them, began to produce artwork that aimed at direct political engagement by means of a systematic engagement with politically charged social sub-systems: Factory Work (Kelly); Real-estate speculation (Haacke); Public Maintenance/Sanitation (Ukeles).

Hans Haacke's work, much of which focused on the art system itself as a social sub-system, came in for the heaviest criticism from analytic conceptual art. Charles Harrison stated the basic objection – that Haacke's work was not politically effective – as early as his review of "Projekt '74" (1974), an international avant-garde survey from which Haacke's work *Manet-Projekt '74*

(1974) [Fig.28] had been excluded at a late date: "A few American artists withdrew in support of Hans Haacke – as part of a now familiar ritual in which institutions fail to cope with ideologically null 'political' contributions, involving 'revelations' which should surprise no one, and Haacke has his cake and eats it..."⁷⁴ Mel Ramsden developed Harrison's critique in a broadside against Haacke published in *The Fox* in 1976: "Hans is a talented-but-indignant-Künstler-exposing-petty-bureaucrats-with-socio-logical-systems-analysis... The work sometimes reminds me of counter-culture, that is, it exists in the same space as the institutions it apparently is fighting. It is negative to the institutions, but in the same space. Thus he not only serves the institutions veneer of 'freedom,' he also disappears if the institutions disappear."⁷⁵ Here Ramsden repeated the accusation that Haacke's work was politically ineffectual but added greater specification as to the reasons for this ineffectuality by way of an analogy to the counterculture. Given Ramsden's equation of counterculture with the dominant culture (effectively foreclosing its ostensibly negating force) it is not made clear from which social or cultural location an effective critique could be articulated. Ramsden acknowledged this problem when he stated, "The greatest subversion of the privileged *Kunstwelt* would be to refuse to make art for that *Kunstwelt* whilst making an art as ambitious as that usually seen in the *Kunstwelt*. I have no idea of course how to do this."⁷⁶

Joseph Kosuth has made the most extensive critique of Haacke's work. Going beyond Ramsden's suggestion that Haacke's practice should be thought as analogous to counterculture, Kosuth has gone as far as to suggest that Haacke's

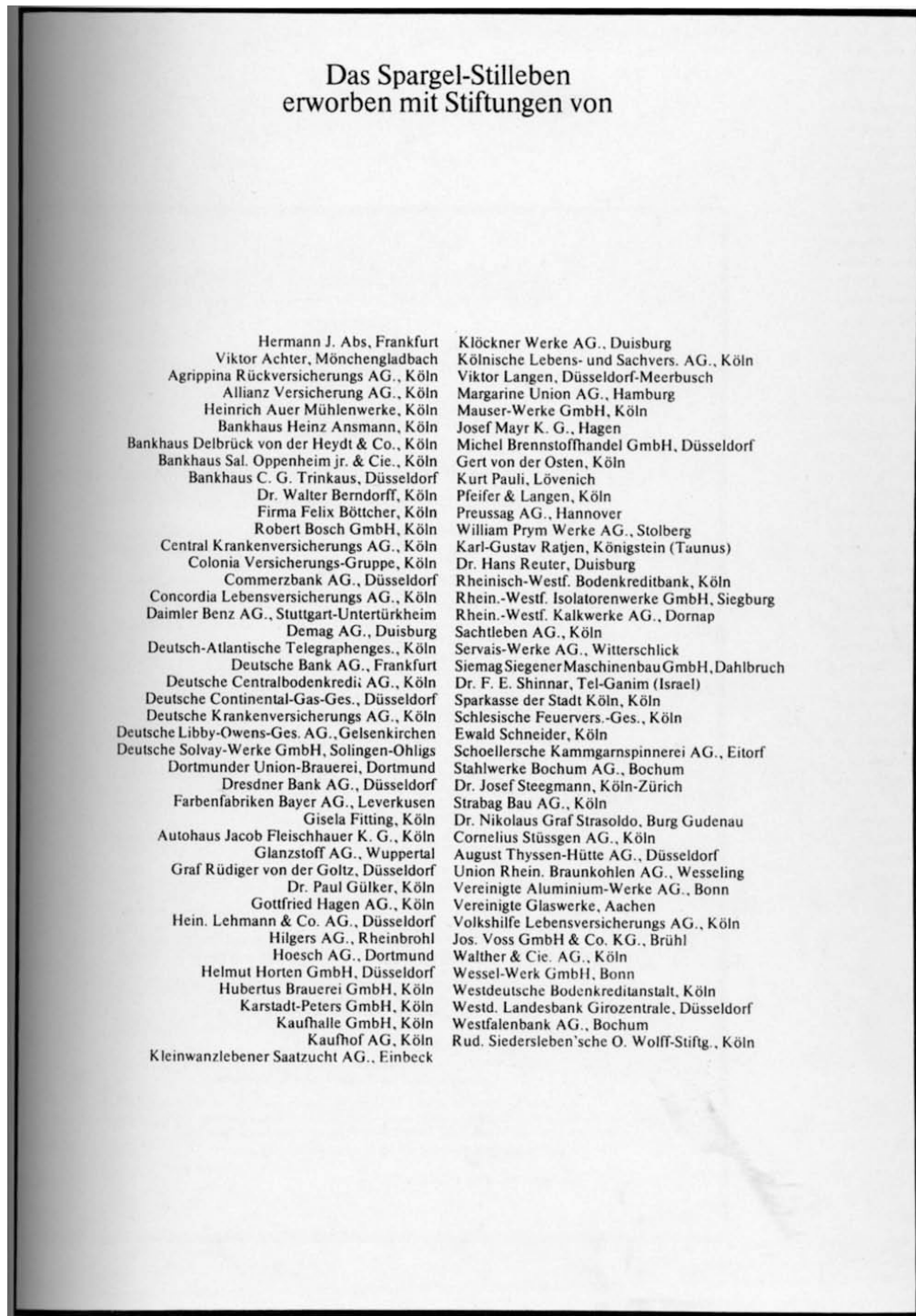


Fig.28. Hans Haacke, *Manet-Projekt '74* (1974).

work made no challenge to the formalist conception of art and constituted nothing more than a stylistic conceptual art:

From the political cultural point of view Hans Haacke's work, for example, regardless of the critical potential of his content within its temporal context, does not fundamentally challenge the self-conception of institutionalised art forms. While Haacke's adoption in the early seventies of a conceptual-style format as the carrier of his political content was successful as a device for questioning society, it was incapable of questioning its own participation in that society as an institution itself. Worse, by positing political consciousness as content and locating it outside of the questioning process of art itself he helped reinforce formalistic presumptions about art and left for the public perception the political eunuch of a conceptual art *style*; some works with political content and some without. This not only reinforced traditional presumptions about art, it thwarted the radical heuristic of conceptual art, safely locating 'political' outside of art's deeper institutional structure.⁷⁷

Even if Kosuth did not feel Haacke challenged formalist modernism, its gatekeepers certainly did. Famously, Haacke executed two major new works for his proposed solo show at the Guggenheim in New York: *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) and the less frequently cited *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). Both pieces set out in forensic detail the slum property interests of New York families, cross-held in shadowy corporations. Haacke was able to reconstruct a schematic representation of a systemic network of social and financial exploitation from his own street photography and records freely available in the New York County Clerk's Office (to the few who would have had the patience, skill and free time to reassemble them). Ostensibly of most concern to Thomas Messer, the then Director of the Guggenheim, was that this sociologically inclined analysis was to be presented *as art*. It was notionally on these grounds that Messer justified his decision to decline Haacke permission to exhibit these works in his own show.⁷⁸ The artist offered to compromise by changing real

names to invented ones, but even this softening of the works' impact was not enough to change Messer's mind. The situation escalated and Haacke's show was cancelled—an infamous act of censorship that still resonates today.

Why then has Haacke, and by extension systematic conceptual art, been subjected to such intense and frequently ill-founded critique by the representatives of analytic conceptual art? Analytical conceptual art's own manifest lack of political agency perhaps motivates these challenges to an art that has demonstrably produced political effects of an order it has not. Kosuth's critique is obliged to discount the actual effects of Haacke's work ("regardless of the critical potential of its content within its temporal context") in order to focus on a formalistic argument regarding its failings, its reinforcement of "traditional presumptions about art." Yet most of the flaws with which Kosuth charges Haacke are at least as applicable to analytic conceptual art. Certainly, it is hard to see how a work such as *Index 01* was more critical "of art's deep institutional structure" than *Shapolsky et al.* Both works relied on non-traditional forms of matching or reference for their art status and both required a direct engagement from the spectator that went well beyond formalist appreciation. Yet Haacke's work was arguably far more provocative to its institutional context than Art & Language's. Today *Index 01* looks like the presentation of good intentions with crypto-minimalist allegiances.

How *Shapolsky et al.* can be held not to challenge "the self-conception of institutionalised art forms" is perplexing. It could be argued that analytic conceptual art, in taking an "apolitical" Anglophone analytic philosophy as its

model, cedes political effectiveness in advance. Analytic philosophy is not set up to challenge the politics of the institutions which enframe it, as Critical Theory has had cause to observe. Kosuth has reflected on the problems attendant upon analytic conceptual art's hybridisation with analytic philosophy: "the paradox of realising the context dependency of art on one hand, while on the other, taking for granted the *location* of that context: the abstract, ahistorical space of modernism. Such space is the 'objective' realm of science culture, and, of course, the language of logical positivism was aptly suited, 'expressive' for the task."⁷⁹ Might this not contribute to the reasons why *The Fox* group's attempts to graft a Marxist politics on to analytic conceptual art practice resulted in such notable failure, and the implosion of analytic conceptual art? Kosuth acknowledged this fundamental problem in the final issue of *The Fox*, "Revolution as a professional niche which isn't mediated through a meaningful anchoring within the social reality (work) becomes idealistic, elitist, messianic, and finally unreal."⁸⁰

In contrast, systematic conceptual art's recognition that it was already embedded within the art system led it to attempt an immanent critique. Furthermore, in conceiving the art system beyond the museum or the gallery, the critique proposed by systematic conceptual art went beyond the narrow problematic of the institution alone.

Synthetic Conceptual Art and Subjectivity

Mary Kelly proposed a modification of the “formula” of both analytic and systematic conceptual art, by suggesting that an understanding of both “subjectivity and sexual difference” were integral to the interrogation of the conditions of the interrogation that conceptual art staged. She defined a mode of conceptual art sympathetic to this modification, namely “synthetic” conceptual art. Kelly proposed that it might be “possible to put the so-called synthetic proposition back on the agenda, that is, to reverse Kosuth’s dictum that art is an analytical proposition, and to say art isn’t confined to speaking about art; it can refer to things outside itself, it can have what you would call “social purpose.”⁸¹

Kelly thus formulated synthetic conceptual art as a straight inversion of Kosuth’s definition of analytic conceptual art. Kosuth, however, had taken his distinction between an analytic and a synthetic proposition from A.J. Ayer: “A.J. Ayer’s evaluation of Kant’s distinction between analytic and synthetic is useful to us here: ‘A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience.’”⁸² Ayer’s empiricist reading of Kant is, however, a contentious one and consequently a problematic foundation on which to build a definition of analytic conceptual art, or to construct an opposition to it via a “synthetic” conceptual art.⁸³

What Kelly had in mind by “synthetic” was not, however, ultimately based on a philosophically stringent definition of its distinction from the “analytic” at all: “What I had assumed to be inevitable—that interrogating the conditions of existence of the object would necessarily include the question of the subject and sexual difference—was not the case. Although there was a move to expand the analytical method beyond the exclusive parameter of aesthetics (for example, *Art and Language* in the mid-1970s), it stopped dramatically short of synthesizing the subjective moment into that inquiry.”⁸⁴ What Kelly meant by “synthetic” then was a form of art practice that rejected Kosuth’s approach by insisting that subjectivity be factored back in to any comprehensive investigation of art’s ontology. The mode of conceptual art that Kelly identified was then “synthetic” in a more straightforward sense, it synthesised ideas drawn from disciplines other than those considered “proper” by analytical conceptual art, namely Feminsim, Psychoanalysis and Semiotics.

Reflecting on the motivations that shaped *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79), Kelly has stated that “it drew attention to the question of ‘women’s practice in art,’ which had been anticipated in the aftermath of conceptualism with the return of ‘synthetic propositions’ and the imposition of ‘social purpose’... it became at least expedient, if not necessary, to acknowledge that the art world had a second sex.”⁸⁵ For Kelly then, synthetic conceptual art’s “social purpose” was to raise the issue of art’s sexual politics.⁸⁶ Kelly’s goals were, of course, shared ones. Feminist practice would emerge as one of the defining issues in 1970s art.⁸⁷ In New York, Adrian Piper began her *Catalysis* series [Fig.29], a group of performance works investigating art’s gender and race politics (a theme that

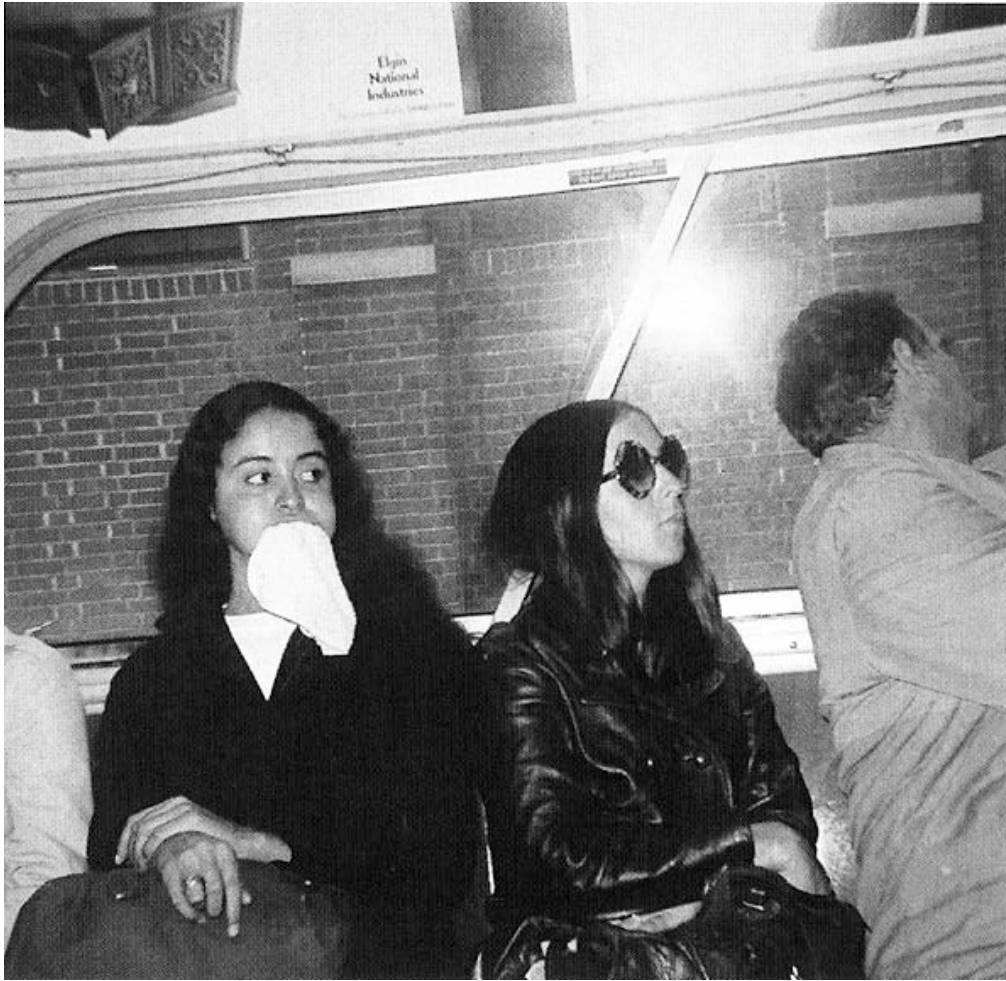


Fig.29. Adrian Piper, *Catalysis IV* (detail) (1970-71).

would come to predominate in her later work). Piper has also described her work in terms of a development from a systematic conceptual art to one concerned with the particularities of individual subjectivation. However, given that LeWitt, rather than Haacke, was Piper's model this produced a different approach to Kelly's, one directly focusing on the self-conscious staging of the artist's body. Mary Kelly has reflected on both approaches:

The art object's "dematerialization" was affected on the one hand by a systematic displacement of its spatial integrity, and on the other by a substitution of the body as its temporal metaphor. The ephemeral yet emotive presence of a work "performed" subverted phenomenological reduction as well as philosophic ordering by introducing the unpredictable dimension of spectatorial transference. And the body, however rigorously deployed within that representational schema, signified as feminine.⁸⁸

The relations between analytic, systematic and synthetic conceptual art have been less commented on than the breaks. Piper, however, traces a genealogy of conceptual art stemming from Sol LeWitt's intimation of art as a "conceptual system" and which includes all of the modes of conceptual art discussed above:

From there it was only a short step to conceptual art's insistence in the late 1960s on the self-reflexive investigation of concepts and language themselves as the primary subject matter of art. And because self-consciousness is a special case of self-reflexivity, it was then an even shorter step to the self-conscious investigation of those very language users and art producers themselves as embedded participant in a social context: For Joseph Kosuth and the Art & Language group, this natural progression was from linguistic analysis of the concept of art to discursive Marxist critique of the means of production; for Hans Haacke, it was from self-sustaining material systems to self-sustaining political systems; in my own work, it was from my body as a conceptually and spatiotemporally immediate art object to my person as a gendered and ethnically stereotyped art commodity.⁸⁹

For Piper then, the trajectory of conceptual art runs from "conceptual system" to "social context" and includes analytic, systematic and synthetic conceptual art as part of the same broad developmental continuum. Though, in contrast,

Mary Kelly clearly favours a developmental model based on the break between the modes of conceptual art, her art nevertheless figures its residual relation to the systematic and analytic conceptual art of which it was both a critique and an extension.

As is well-known, Kelly used psychoanalytic and feminist theory to introduce an interrogation of the gendered artist-subject into art. What is less frequently commented on is the positivist residuum within *Post-Partum Document*, a trait that figures its residual relation to other modes of conceptual art. Dan Graham draws attention to this aspect of Kelly's work; explicitly distinguishing its scientific presentation from the artist's interest in "female subjectivity:"

Of course I was fascinated by female subjectivity that was also conceptual art. Because I saw all the problems of didacticism in the law of official conceptual art. Specifically, the Art & Language style work. But I also think what I liked about PPD was the 'do-it-yourself' science. My parents were scientists, and I liked art being partly about education and partly about increasing your own understanding of your subjective life situation. PPD was somewhere between two normally irreconcilable positions, it was totally scientific and subjective.⁹⁰

In remarking on the co-presentation of the scientific and the subjective, "two normally irreconcilable positions," Graham captures the fundamental ambivalence of *Post-Partum Document*: it employed positivist methodology, but against itself.

From the perspective of the present it is hard not to interpret Kelly's obsessive investigations (including conducting detailed tabulations of faecal smear patterns left on nappies) as, at least at some level, a satire on positivism. Whether Kelly would share such a reading of her work is, however, less clear.

Kelly's original reaction to the hostile tabloid response to *Post-Partum Document* (predictably fixating on the aforementioned faecal smear patterns) was to stress that her work was entirely in earnest: "I know... that it makes people hostile, but I want this to be taken seriously. I am not doing this as a joke."⁹¹ Yet a satire is not the same thing as a joke since it always has critical intentions.

The synthetic mode of conceptual art also marked the end of conceptual art as an active response complex: as art turned to more directly engaged issues of identity politics and institutional critique, the question of what art was (the foundation of conceptual art) became less directly staged. "Social purpose" and "social context" become more pressing than ontological enquiry. Yet it was also in the abandonment of ontological questioning that synthetic conceptual art (and post-conceptual art more generally) met its own limits.

Though the critique of systematic conceptual art undertaken by analytic conceptual art and synthetic conceptual art was not theoretically decisive it was nevertheless the case that artists making systematic conceptual art did relinquish their commitment to this artistic position. "Systems-speak" was no longer invoked by artists much beyond the mid-seventies. Individual artists' reasons for relinquishing their systematic conceptual art practice varied in relation to the internal logic of their own work and their particular circumstances. Broader socio-historical forces effected artists' decision making. This went well beyond the conventional pressure on artists to develop their practice, avoiding working in an outmoded "style." The direct implication of the positivist natural and social sciences with the martial imperatives of the

Military Industrial Complex meant that the countercultural potential of systems theory, cybernetics, information theory and their cognate disciplines suffered in the artistic imagination. They were no longer seen as potentially emancipatory, art was no longer perceived to be able to “recode” them for progressive aims. The prevailing artistic climate had changed. As most of the art world sought, broadly and rather simplistically, to oppose “the System” and its technocratic apparatus, systematic conceptual art’s promise as a viable artistic strategy seemed to disappear.

In a telling reflection of this situation, Hans Haacke planned a work entitled *Norbert: All Systems Go* (1971) [Fig.30]. The work was to have consisted of a caged mynah bird parroting the phrase “All Systems Go” repeatedly and indiscriminately. *Norbert* in fact can only be accessed imaginatively: the bird’s reluctance to parrot the phrase and the cancellation of Haacke’s planned Guggenheim show of 1971 (which was to have been entitled “Systems”) prevented this work-in-progress from leaving the studio. Here cybernetics’ founding father was to have been parodied; his optimistic feedback-steered path of human progress undermined. The affirmative “All systems go!” of the Space Age translated, through the sardonic refrain of a caged bird, “All systems go...” (i.e. run down, no longer fit their intended purpose, fail).⁹² Here Haacke seemed to undermine the emancipatory rhetoric habitually associated with technological development in favour of an emphasis on entropy more familiar from the resolutely sceptical body of work produced by Robert Smithson.



Fig.30. Hans Haacke, *Norbert: All Systems Go* (1970).

Haacke's position was, however, more hopeful than Smithson's. Haacke certainly intended *Norbert* to parody a strain of cybernetic theory dominant in a technocratic world. Yet the apparently cynical and technophobic exercise of trying to train a mynah bird to endlessly announce the principle of entropy can also be thought in less negative terms. Might there not have been an invitation here, however covert, to free the caged bird? Surely the transgression of opening the cage door and letting the bird escape is a possibility that the piece countenances? Particularly when we consider *Ten Turtles Set Free* (1970) [Fig.31], a piece broadly contemporary with *Norbert* that Haacke did realize and document. Such an action might constitute a real act of liberation, a symbolically loaded and institutionally unsanctioned ethical choice. Rather than submit to the tedium of passively engaging the piece on its ostensible, institutionally sanctioned, terms, the viewer might step in and realign the rules.⁹³ The system could be opened along with the cage. Furthermore, the individual might find suggested his or her own potential for emancipation along with Norbert. As Haacke has insisted: "Works of art, like other products of the consciousness industry, are potentially capable of shaping their consumers' view of the world and of themselves and may lead them to act upon that understanding."⁹⁴ The ambiguity of *Norbert: All Systems Go* both comments on and reflects the society that called the work forth.



Fig.31. Hans Haacke, *Ten Turtles Set Free* (1970).

All Systems Go

The renunciation of systems thinking did not automatically imply a progressive artistic or political position. In order to gain some purchase on the dissolution of systematic conceptual art it is necessary to consider what it was abandoned for, what discourse or discourses artists replaced systems thinking with.⁹⁵ Mel Bochner, having returned to painting conventionally construed (despite starting his career with a strong rejection of the practice) might thus be considered an artist whose work is regressive with respect to the conceptual project and its historical achievements. Bochner has retrospectively insisted that:

Without the history of the practice of painting as the background for all my work, it becomes a series of disparate gestures... once you recognize that my work is an analytical attempt to rethink painting's functions and meanings, you realize that it's all one continuous investigation. In my own mind, my project has always been a kind of research based on the idea of bracketing and unbracketing. When you bracket you set something aside, you don't eliminate it.⁹⁶

Bochner's "return to painting" cannot simply be associated with the reactionary Neo-Expressionist painting prevalent in the culturally conservative climate of the 1980s since Bochner's claim is to have worked *through* conceptual art and back to painting. Such claims nevertheless explicitly modify his own earlier description of his project, as given to *Data* magazine in 1972. Here the question of an ontological ground for art was left open and in debate, art was precisely the process of enquiring into its own ontological ground: "The 'art' is the demonstration of the network of supports that forms the system..."⁹⁷ Although it should be acknowledged that in the 1960s Bochner was still working in relation to a formalist, medium-specific framework—he makes work entitled *A Theory of Painting*; *A Theory of Sculpture*; *A Theory of Photography*—it

should be understood that formalist categories were radically put in suspension by the theory in these works.

Yet in his later practice Bochner returned to canvas-based painting, via a transitional phase of systematic wall painting, without any convincing theoretical elaboration of why this might be a legitimate artistic, rather than simply regressive or market-oriented, move. When pressed on this issue by James Meyer in interview Bochner could only offer the unconvincing claim that “In some way, I have always thought of myself as a painter... a painter who just didn’t happen to paint” while at the same time also acknowledging that this constituted a retrospective narrativisation of his own practice “what I can see in retrospect is that it’s the absence of painting that gives definition to the *Photo Pieces*, the *Measurements*, the *Theory of Boundaries*. They all circulated around that missing signifier.”⁹⁸

A more plausible explanation for Bochner’s return to painting would seem to lie in his rejection of conceptual art, a double refutation of both its systematic and analytic modes. Bochner’s *Language is Not Transparent* (1970) [Fig.32] staged a refutation of an understanding of analytic conceptual art (as linguistic), by means of an insistence on the materiality of the signifier.⁹⁹ For Bochner, the revelation of the materiality of the signifier seemed to spark a renewed concern for materiality in art that was taken up as a renewed affection for paint as the exemplary artistic “material.” Bochner has been even more explicit about the reasons for his departure from systematic conceptual art:



Fig.32. Mel Bochner, *Language is not Transparent* (1970).

Seriality was a search for a new type of certainty, because it's about one thing being necessarily after another. The following being predicated on the preceding eliminates choice, and therefore doubt... Because there is no decision making after the initial choice of systems. Everything is pre-executive. But when you reach the point where you question that whole apparatus of thought, you realize that doubt is inevitable in art or, for that matter, in anything one does.¹⁰⁰

Bochner concluded with the observation that “Systemic thinking repressed the spontaneous and the intuitive...”¹⁰¹ This was surely the point, reacting against the definition of art as the emanation of the genius, originality or taste of the individual artistic subject. Yet for Bochner painting, qua painting, authorised the return of the spontaneous and the intuitive in art (through the back door of “doubt”). Thus, despite his protestations to the contrary, the legitimating discourse for Bochner's painting (as art) remains (implicitly) formalist modernism. As such, his later work looks historically regressive with respect to the earlier. It does not even put the practice of painting in question.

The development of Victor Burgin's practice also involved a rejection of analytic conceptual art but was more ambiguous than Bochner's in its relation to systematic conceptual art. Quite early in the debates surrounding *Art-Language* it became clear that Burgin did not share the analytic conceptual art line as articulated by ALUK. Burgin addressed the criticisms that had been levelled against him by Michael Baldwin and Terry Atkinson in their article “Unnatural Rules and Excuses:”

As there is no particular sense to be made of such expressions as ‘turn language into paint’... then I can hardly answer this particular pseudo charge... If the term ‘analytic’ is not being used in a technical sense to indicate a l'art pour l'art position then it has not been made at all clear just what is being analysed by artists of declared ‘analytic’ intent. To claim to analyse ‘art’ would be essentialist nonsense. While we may analyse ‘the concept of art’ which empirically means this or that use of the term ‘art’ and

whatever synonyms we might ascribe to it, the empirical study of word-uses belongs increasingly to linguistics.¹⁰²

What was not at issue in these exchanges was that Burgin's alliance was increasingly with a semiotic model of meaning and that he broke with analytic philosophy's narrow ontological enquiries: "I believe we must accept the responsibility of producing an art which has more than just *Art* as its content, and which carries the possibility of becoming more than just the rejectementa of our economic surplus..."¹⁰³ After the early, albeit satiric, interest in systems theory and cybernetics demonstrated in *Carton Programme* and "Art-Society Systems" and the limit-phenomenological inquiries of *Photopath* and "Situational Aesthetics", Burgin turned to Althusserian Marxism, semiotics and psychoanalysis as the legitimating discourses for his work. Burgin's break with analytic conceptual art occasioned a further critique from Art & Language "Exit overly formalistic Vic – the Old Vic... Enter the New Vic in the Emperor's new clothes... Enter the New Vic with a semiotique g-string..."¹⁰⁴ Burgin's relationship to structuralism, that is art considered as part of a signifying system, leaves his work in a more ambiguous relationship to systematic conceptual art. This is evidenced by the odd mix of references to both semiosis and circuitry, Levi-Strauss and Ervin Laszlo, in the context of his article "Rules of Thumb."¹⁰⁵

Hans Haacke also shifted his theoretical register and preferred lexicon. From the early 1970s onwards, as systems theory became unhappily elided with the System, Haacke increasingly framed his artistic concerns in relation to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological analyses of art as a "field" of cultural production.¹⁰⁶ The adequacy of Bourdieu's sociological account of art will not be broached

here. What is crucial to note is that Haacke's turn to Bourdieu did not represent a fundamental change in his artistic self-conception. His early interest in systems thinking and systematic conceptual art subtends his later work, as he has acknowledged: "One could argue that 'institutional critique' cannot be performed without an understanding of the 'system' or 'field' of the art world."¹⁰⁷

Institutional critique (exemplified by Haacke), an art of social *context*, and identity politics (exemplified by Kelly), an art investigating subjectivity and social *relations*, arguably two of the most immediately influential post-conceptual practices, can be seen to share a genealogical root in systematic conceptual art. The ends of systematic conceptual art comprised new beginnings. Following LeWitt, "The conventions of art are altered by works of art."¹⁰⁸

5. Institution as Contexts and Relations

A Test Case

In 2006 Carsten Höller realised *Test Site* [Fig.33], the seventh in the Unilever Series of large-scale commissions for the turbine hall of the Tate Modern. The work comprised five theme park slides, each descending from one of the museum's upper levels to its ground floor. What is the status of an artwork that consists of a slide? Answering this question will prove convoluted. Höller encapsulated *Test Site* in the exhibition pamphlet which accompanied his installation—"A slide is a sculpture that you can travel inside"—but qualified his own account with the caveat that—"however, it would be a mistake to think that you have to use the slide to make sense of it. Looking at the work from the outside is a different but equally valid experience."¹ We catch a wry note in Höller's account, switching priority as it does between emphasising the work's functional and aesthetic claims.

Contributing to the confusion is the fact that Höller has also stressed the provisional status of this work, insisting that it was simply his largest scale-model to date.² Ever since the appearance of his first slides (*Valerio I & II*, produced for the Berlin Kunst-Werke in 1998) [Fig.34 & Fig.35], Höller has repeatedly claimed that all of them are merely works-in-progress: the artist's stated end-goal being to integrate his slides into everyday urban life. For the Tate exhibition Höller commissioned Foreign Office Architects to undertake a case study, including detailed proof-of-concept drawings, for a "Hypothetical Slide House" (a skyscraper latticed with slides).³ Höller also had General Public Agency (a planning and regeneration consultancy) conduct a full, London-



Fig.33. Carsten Höller, *Test Site* (2006).



Fig.34. Carsten Höller, *Valerio I* (1998).



Fig.35. Carsten Höller, *Valerio II* (1998).

based feasibility study for “slides in the public realm.” [Fig.36]⁴ Ultimately, his broader project is to thread the fabric of the city with slides, within and between buildings, and in so doing produce for the public a daily moment of thrill that would offer “relief or even freedom” from the pervasive utilitarianism of contemporary capitalist existence.⁵ As such, Höller’s project seeks to intervene in and alter both the conventional social *context* of art and the conventional social *relations* associated with its “appreciation.” Yet, given the fact that this broader project has not been realised (and may of course never have seriously been intended to be) the institutional nexus in which Höller’s work appears thus remains integral to the work. The social relations and the social context that *Test Site* intervenes in are *internal* to the artworld’s institutional frame. Höller’s amusement park ride is a long way from Rodchenko’s Worker’s Club.

To what extent then does Höller’s project intend to intervene and alter art? Or, in other words, what are its ontological stakes as well as its critical stakes? The convoluted status of *Test Site* can be used as a test case by means of which to introduce a wider critical assessment of a broader set of “context” and “relational” art practices that have established the grounds of a contemporary, post-postmodern art.

As was established in chapter one, Höller’s work has been characterised as *both* relational and context art. Here we need to develop the provisional remarks advanced in the first chapter into a more substantive account of the character of relational and context art. There it was suggested that the two tendencies

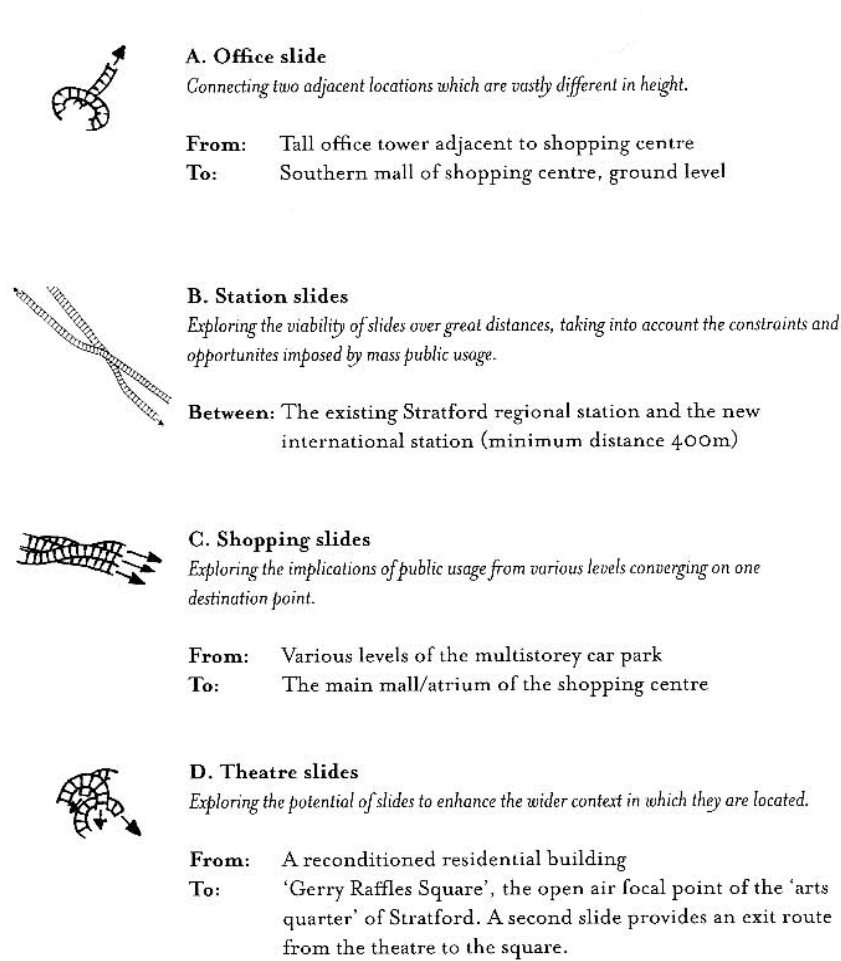


Fig.36. General Public Agency, *Slides in the Public Realm* (2006).

should be considered as related, but not congruent, strategies within the artistic problematic of critique, specifically the problem of how to produce an autonomous, post-postmodern, contemporary art. For Bourriaud there was little to separate relational art and context art whereas for Andrea Fraser (perhaps the principal theorist of context art as well as one of its most important practitioners) context art should be strongly distinguished from relational art. Fraser's objection to relational art is that it is essentially affirmative whereas context art is critical: "the mythologies of voluntarism freedom and creative omnipotence... have made art and artists... attractive emblems for neo-liberalism's entrepreneurial, "ownership-society" optimism... such optimism has found perfect artistic expression in... relational aesthetics."⁶ Whose claims are justified? We will approach this issue by considering the genealogy of relational and context art.

Given that we have claimed that contemporary art can best be characterised with reference to its distinctively post-conceptual character, it is through the relationship to conceptual art that relational and context art must be assessed. Addressing the consolidation of context kunst as an artistic category Gillick confirms the relevance of so doing: "The legacy of second order conceptual art also had an effect – art beyond the initial desire to define a possibility or a set of truisms through brief action or statement. Douglas Huebler, Hans Haacke and others constructed more complex structures that acknowledged the socio-political constructions that determine and value art production and interaction beyond a challenge to the formal state of the art objects alone."⁷ Gillick's use of the term "structure" in relation to the distinctive contribution of "second order

conceptual art” is directly analogous to the term “system” as it was utilised in the Sixties and Seventies. It is from systematic conceptual art that relational and context art inherit their focus on the social relations and the social context of art.

That this has not been more readily recognised is a function of the obscurity that has been generated by the use of the term “institutional critique” to designate so-called “second order” conceptual practice. Both relational and context artists acknowledge that many of their concerns descend from a negotiated relation to institutional critique. Yet the very term “institutional critique” is problematic: in privileging “institution” over “system” it obscures the origins of institutional critique. Such terminological confusion has had, and continues to produce, conceptual confusions that characterise contemporary art, affecting its ability to comprehend the challenges attendant upon the production of autonomous artworks today. The institutional form, like the commodity form (though abounding in far fewer metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties), obscures the social context and the social relations of its producers.

Challenging the Institution of Institutional Critique

Andrea Fraser's article "In and Out of Place" (1985) stands as an early landmark in the reception of Louise Lawler's work but also, and more importantly for our argument, in the conceptual elaboration of "institutional critique" as a critical category.⁸ Fraser's article was written at the beginning of her artistic career and introduced many of the concerns that continue to inflect her work today.⁹ The first generation of Institutional Critique practitioners is conventionally held to comprise Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Marcel Broodthaers; second generation artists include Louise Lawler, Jenny Holzer, Barabara Kruger and Martha Rosler; third generation artists number: Greg Bordowitz, Tom Burr, Clegg & Guttman, Stephan Dilleuth, Mark Dion, Renée Green, Chrisitan Phillipp Müller, Nils Norman and Fraser herself.¹⁰ As such, Fraser's article embodies a hinge between what have been historicised as "second" and "third" generations of "institutional critique".

Before examining the discursive construction of institutional critique as a critical category in more detail, it is important to note the general challenge involved in discriminating different "orders" or generations of institutional critique (a "movement" that is already a sub-set of conceptual art). This challenge centres around the opposition, perhaps even factionalisation, between those critics who conceive contemporary art in terms of its constitutively *post*-conceptual character (such as Peter Osborne, Charles Harrison and Jeff Wall) and those who conceive contemporary art in terms of possible "*neo*" relations of recovery or development of historical—that is, earlier

generation—conceptual art (such as Blake Stimson and Alexander Alberro). An added complication here, given a reading of conceptual artists as the last partisans of the avant-garde, is that the possibility of a neo-conceptual art also gets run together with issues surrounding the ongoing possibility of an avant-garde. As Blake Stimson specifies: “Whether... [conceptual art’s] legacy as the art of 1968 will be to pass its inherited ideal forward through neo-conceptualism and on to a future moment when avant-gardism might once again be viable, or whether it will mark a point in the history of modernism when that ideal passed into irrelevance, remains an open question.”¹¹

The problem with this way of framing the problem is that it suggests that the challenge of producing an autonomous art can be understood as an historically invariant activity (“its inherited ideal”), a matter of passively waiting for the tenor of the times to once again summon the critical spirit (“when avant-gardism might once again be viable”), rather than of actively forging critique in relation to the exigencies of the present. Beyond the problems of its political passivity, such a presentation of the issue does not account for the decisive change to art effected by conceptual art. Art after conceptual art is not the same as art before conceptual art and speaking of successive “generations” of conceptual art, even if only as a hypothetical possibility, misrepresents the break effected by conceptual art, suggesting continuity where there is rupture. Here then contemporary art will be understood as constitutively post-conceptual: contemporary art *qua* autonomous art is post-conceptual because it is obliged to have recognised and responded to the challenge to art posed by the various modes of “historical” conceptual art. Given this situation, it is

necessary to ensure that the critical history of conceptual art is sufficiently nuanced to have captured the original complexity of conceptual art such that the full critical specificity of the “post” in post-conceptual art is recognised and accounted for.

Recovering the systems genealogy and systematic mode of conceptual art provides a richer conceptual genealogy of contemporary art. Here then it will be argued that institutional critique is a *strategy* rather than a genre or movement, one that falls within conceptual art proper, as part of its systematic mode. Consequently, art after conceptual art is ontologically inflected by conceptual art without being “neo-conceptual”. We reject an approach which seeks to write the historiography of conceptual art in terms of successive generations or orders. The term “neo-conceptual” is thus reserved as a pejorative label for art with the “look” of conceptual art but none of the (ontological) substance.¹²

Conventionally, however, institutional critique is held to begin at the end of the developmental arc of conceptual art as influentially traced by Buchloh, an account that traces conceptual art’s evolution from an early “aesthetic of administration” to an end point in a “critique of institutions.”

Paradoxically, then, it would appear that Conceptual Art truly became the most significant paradigmatic change of postwar artistic production at the very moment that it mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality in an effort to place its auto-critical investigations at the service of liquidating even the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience. In that process it succeeded in purging itself entirely of imaginary and bodily experience, of physical substance and the space of memory, to the same extent that it effaced all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill. That was the moment when Buren's and Haacke's work from the late 1960s onward turned the violence of that mimetic

relationship back onto the ideological apparatus itself, using it to analyze and expose the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place. These institutions, which determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimization.¹³

Yet the historical critique of institutions that Buchloh describes here is not equivalent to a formalised genre of work understanding itself as “institutional critique.” Although Buchloh’s work provides the spur for the definition of the term, Buchloh does not originally set it down in print. Andrea Fraser has laid claim to its first published usage in her essay on Lawler. However, Fraser acknowledges Buchloh’s work, particularly his “Allegorical Procedures” essay of 1982, as the foundation for her own thinking.¹⁴ She also allows for the possibility that Buchloh, or one of her other tutors on the Whitney Independent Study program, may have coined the term orally: “Having studied with Buchloh as well as Craig Owens, who edited my essay on Lawler, I think it’s quite possible that one of them let ‘Institutional Critique’ slip out.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, Fraser has speculated that it was her and her colleagues at the Whitney – Gregg Bordowitz, Joshua Decker and Mark Dion – who effectively, though unwittingly, constructed a canon in support of her newly minted term: “Not having found an earlier published appearance of the term, it is curious to consider that the established canon we thought we were receiving may have just been forming at the time. It could even be that our very reception of ten- or fifteen-year-old works, reprinted texts, and tardy translations, and our perception of those works and texts as canonical, was a central moment in the process of Institutional Critique’s so-called institutionalization.”¹⁶

Institutional critique, as presented by Fraser, is thus a *retroactive* critical term: it is only with the emergence of its purported “third generation” of artists that it gains programmatic currency. In this sense institutional critique can be distinguished from even the most contentious attempts to designate artistic “movements” which have tended to emerge at the same time as the art that they purport to bound. Were it to be effective as a critical category the retroactive status of Fraser’s term would not of course disqualify it — the problem is rather that it both misrepresents the historical work it claims to derive from and does so by largely ignoring the accounts of this work that were offered by its practitioners.

It is the so-called “third generation” of theorist/practitioners who develop institutional critique as a distinctive genre of artistic work and no one has been more influential in this effort than Fraser herself. Such a situation, as the artist readily admits, leaves her in an ambivalent position: “And so I find myself enmeshed in the contradictions and complicities, ambitions, and ambivalence that Institutional Critique is often accused of, caught between the self-flattering possibility that I was the first person to put the term in print, and the critically shameful prospect of having played a role in the reduction of certain radical practices to a pithy catchphrase, packaged for co-optation.”¹⁷ Yet the ambivalence of Fraser’s position goes beyond simply embodying the intrinsic tension between autonomous critique and heteronomous recuperation that haunts any “radical practice.” Fraser’s position, in relying on Buchloh’s attenuated history of conceptual art, is historically inaccurate, perhaps even strategically amnesiac.

The first issue of *The Fox* (1975), one of the most significant publications in the American conceptual art context, explicitly advanced the claim, making it almost a programmatic statement, that the challenge for an art after conceptual art was to turn towards a critique of the institution of art. Sarah Charlesworth's essay "A Declaration of Dependence" stands at the beginning of the first issue of the magazine and articulates its underlying themes: "If we speak significantly about art in modern European and American culture, we see that its meaning, function and value within society are clearly institutionally mediated; and that not only artistic values, but the intellectual and ideological forces which explain, interpret and legitimise art practice have their origins in the very same traditions that presuppose that institutional order."¹⁸ In the same issue Mel Ramsden made the first published reference to "institutional critique" in his article "On Practice."¹⁹ Ramsden's article is published a full seven years before Buchloh's "Allegorical Procedures" and ten years before Fraser's "In and Out of Place."

Rather than focusing on who coined the neologism it is important to move the debate on from Fraser's "self-flattering" concerns over terminological precedence and refocus on the substantive critical issues involved. The first issue of the *The Fox* is of central importance since here since it problematised the political effectiveness of institutional critique at its inception.

Fraser's concern about the "co-optation" of Institutional Critique is not the significant issue if it was always and necessarily co-opted. The question is rather

whether, with Ramsden, one believes that the political potential of institutional critique was neutralised from the start, or whether, with Haacke, one believes that some form of immanent critique of the art system is conceived to be possible. As has been discussed in chapter four, the debates generated by *The Fox* group led Mel Ramsden to identify what he saw as the problem with Haacke's work, namely that, like the counterculture, it existed in the same space as the institutions it was apparently fighting, raising the spectre that it would disappear if the institutions disappeared.²⁰ Consequently, for Ramsden, Haacke's work was not genuinely political at all: "It's normally assumed that Haacke's work has political content. It doesn't. It has political subject-matter. The content isn't really all that controversial. Here again politics isn't internalised, it's illustrated. This isn't merely caused by bad strategy, it's a reflection of the way all art is muzzled today."²¹

It was not that Ramsden claimed to exempt his own work, or that of *The Fox* group, from the problems he identified. Rather, the issue translated into a reformist versus a revolutionary politics beyond the confines of the art institution. Charlesworth also pointed this out from the beginning, insisting that the institutional structures of the art world were inseparable from the larger socio-political systems which enframed them:

The structural system of the art-world, which provides a context for the social signification of art, is itself contextually situated in a social system, the structure of which it in turn reflects. At this point, attempts to question or transform the nature of art beyond formalistic considerations must inevitably begin to involve a consideration not only of the presuppositions inherent in the internal structure of art models, but also a critical awareness of the social system which preconditions and dialectically confines the possibility of transformation.²²

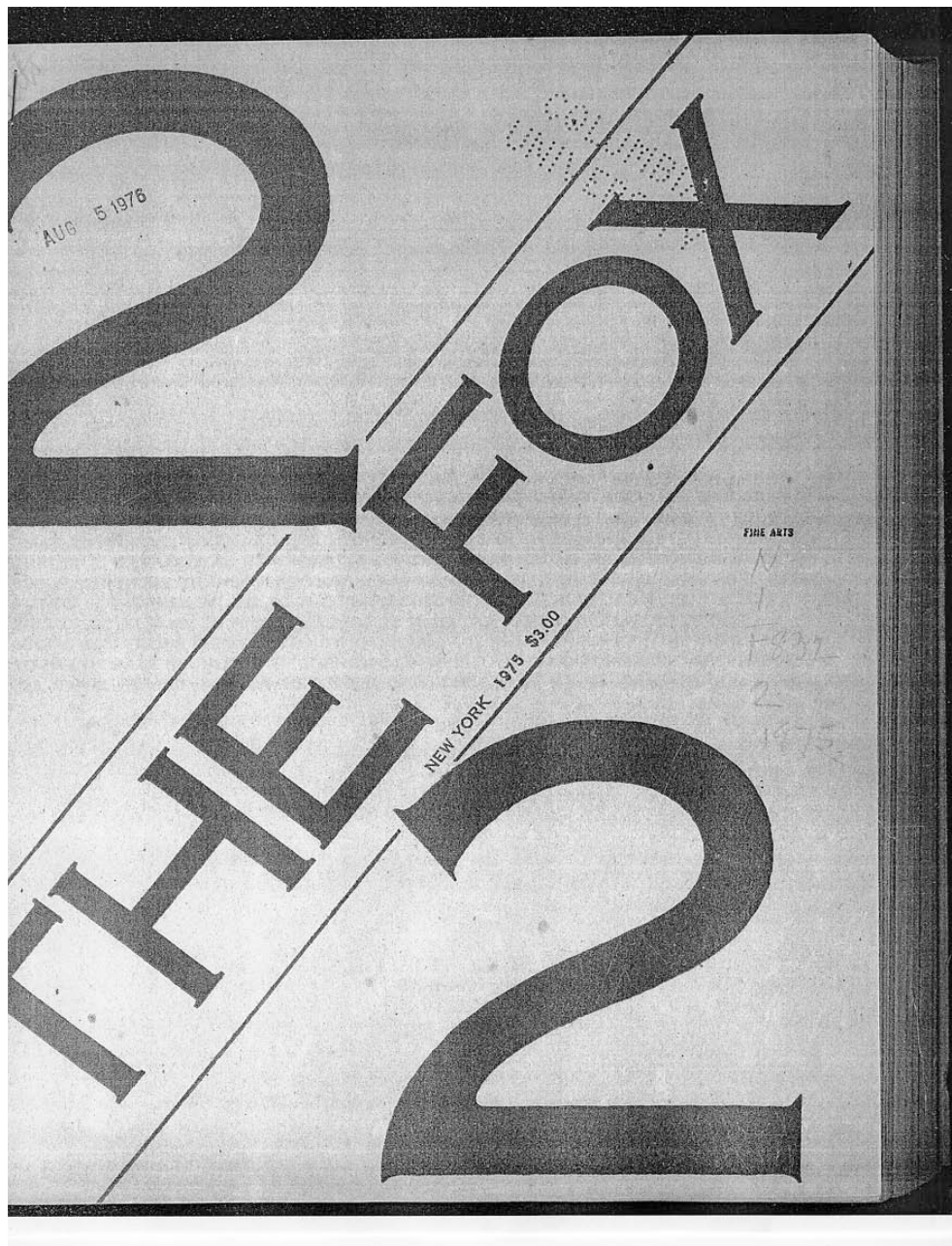


Fig.37. *The Fox 2* (1975).

In fairness to Fraser she does insist on the sophisticated conceptualisation of the “institution of art” developed in the work of certain practitioners in the late Sixties: “From 1969 on, a conception of ‘the institution of art’ begins to emerge that includes not just the museum, nor even only the sites of production, distribution, and reception of art, but the entire field of art as a social universe.”²³ In this respect she repudiates the restricted understanding of the “institution” that operates in much of today’s generic, institutionally-sanctioned, institutional critique where it frequently stands for something as simple as an “intervention” in or on the physical space of the museum or gallery. Yet even given her expanded definition of the institution of art Fraser neglects to emphasise the connection between art and other social systems, art as a system is treated autonomously, “the entire field of *art* as a social universe.”²⁴

Fraser exemplifies this problem when she identifies Hans Haacke as the pre-eminent exponent of the more sophisticated understanding of the “Institution” from which her own practice departs: “Haacke... came to Institutional Critique through a turn from physical and environmental systems in the 1960s to social systems, starting with his gallery-visitor polls of 1969-73. Beyond the most encompassing list of substantive spaces, places, people, and things, the “institution” engaged by Haacke can best be defined as the network of social and economic relations between them.”²⁵ Here the art system, and its “network of social and economic relationships” is not related to the social systems within which it inheres.

By focusing on the term “institution”, however expanded its self-conception, Fraser misses the interrelations between art and other social systems which were central to both Haacke and Buren’s politics. Haacke has asserted that institutional critique as a critical category depends on a broader “understanding of the ‘system’ or ‘field’ of the art world” in relation to other social systems.²⁶ Daniel Buren has queried “what would it mean to take the art world itself as a political problem? Is that micro-system a total revelation or reverberation of the general system? If it is not, where does the weight of the political system make itself felt in the art world?”²⁷ It is arguably from Michael Asher that Fraser derives the narrower “institutional” focus of institutional critique. Asher described his practice as “an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements occurring within the institutional framework, that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself.”²⁸

Fraser’s summary of the achievements of the “first generation” of institutional critique artists is revealing in this regard and thus merits quotation in full:

What they constituted as the fundamental practice of art was nothing less than work on the conditions and relations of production of artistic practice itself: not only the symbolic transformation of artistic positions...but their material transformation as well; the transformation not only of the positions artists represent within the paradigmatic frame of an *aesthetic system*, but the very positions they occupy and the economic and social relations that produce those positions and which they in turn reproduce... The material arrangements that artists of the past thirty years have endeavoured to put into place, both to secure the means to continue their activities and as an integral part of their works, are not only *conceptual systems*. They are also *practical systems* that fulfil, or fail to fulfil, the principles of artistic positions on the level of their social and institutional conditions. Far from functioning only as ideology critique, they have aimed to construct a less ideological form of autonomy, conditioned not by the abstraction of relations of consumption in the commodity form, but by the conscious and critical determination, in each particular and immediate instance, of the uses to which artistic activity is put and the interests it serves.²⁹

On this account, the various practices subsumed under the misleading designation of “institutional critique” are reduced to a contestation, however “material,” of the isolated museum, gallery or private collection without acknowledging their own recognition that they were themselves implicated within, and dependent on, the wider capitalist system. Here institutional critique appears as reified rather than recuperated.³⁰

The problem has thus always been, as Michael Newman has suggested of staying one step ahead of reification.³¹ In this sense, it is possible to begin to outline an answer to Andrea Fraser’s open question: “Today, the argument goes, there no longer is an outside. How, then can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an *all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification*?”³²

Fraser’s response to this crisis consists in *accepting* the reification of institutional critique as the condition of the development of a putative institution of critique: “Institutional Critique turned from the increasingly bad-faith efforts of neo-avant gardes at dismantling or escaping the institution of art and aimed instead to defend the very institution for which the institutionalization of the avant-gardes’ “self-criticism” had created the potential: *an institution of critique*.”³³ This position has led Fraser to insist that the institution of art includes the subjectivity of the artist: “And this is also the basis for the ambivalence of Institutional Critique, because while these relations may be fundamentally social, they are never only ‘out there,’ in sites and situations, much less



Fig.38. Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights* (1989).

“institutions,” that are discrete and separable from ourselves. *We are the institution of art: the object of our critiques, our attacks, is always also inside ourselves.*”³⁴

In a perverse extension of Bürger’s claims for the failure and subsequent institutionalisation of the avant-garde, Fraser’s “solution” to the problem of the reification of institutional critique, is to insist on the all encompassing nature of the institution, up to and including artistic subjectivity: “So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a ‘totally administered society,’ or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us and we can’t get outside of ourselves.”³⁵

Such an intensified understanding of the extent of the “institution” can be observed in the development of Fraser’s practice. Her early work *Museum Highlights* (1989) [Fig.38] involved Fraser posing as, and parodying, a museum docent. Fraser applied a theatrical *verfremdungseffekt* to the ritualised form of the guided tour in order to unmask the ideology of the public collection which the tour is designed to seamlessly transmit. By the time Fraser made *Untitled* (2003) [Fig.39], a video document of her own sexual commission by a paying collector, she had abandoned all pretence of unmasking any ideology and instead submitted herself to the logic of the market in a self-consciously brutal troping of the artworld’s social relations.³⁶ Here Fraser perversely attempted to validate her heteronomous position *as an artist* (subjected to a return to the oldest and most direct form of “patronage”) as the grounds of a “less ideological form of autonomy” *for the artwork* so produced (she stressed that the



Fig.39. Andrea Fraser, *Untitled* (2003).

collector did not pay for sex but in order to collaborate in the making of an artwork). Fraser thus mistake the level at which autonomy of art can be secured. The problem with Fraser's work is that it produces ever more sophisticated critical interventions in and on the institution of art (itself understood ever more sophisticatedly and as ever more totalising) without proposing an alternative, either an alternative institutionalisation or an alternative to institutionalisation.

Given Fraser's focus on the "institution" invoked by institutional critique and the heteronomous artistic position this has led her to, the question presents itself as to whether Fraser has neglected to pay sufficient attention to the adequacy of "critique" as it is understood by institutional critique. Is there an affirmative quality to Fraser's critical acceptance of the all-pervasiveness of the institution? Isabelle Graw has suggested that "it seems necessary to analyze how the artistic competencies usually associated with institutional critique (research, teamwork, personal risk-taking and so on) actually feed, sometimes quite perfectly, into what sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have described as 'the new spirit of capitalism.'"³⁷ Reconceiving the history of institutional critique as the progressive opening of systems art to the art system and, crucially, the wider social systems which enframe and engage that art system (up to and including the totality of the capitalist system) allows us to think other possibilities of artistic critique and resistance, for example by revisiting the conception of artistic autonomy beyond Fraser's rather narrow understanding of the term, overdetermined by her acceptance of Peter Bürger and Pierre Bourdieu as theoretical models.

By returning the focus to the problem of critique, rather than the problem of the institution, we focus on the ongoing possibilities of a critical art. Revisiting Ian Burn's original analysis of the problem of critique, we might consider the most important challenge for a critical art as being one of transforming art's reality by realizing its socialization. Running as subtitles through a trenchant *Artforum* article of 1975, "The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation," Burn asserted that "While we've been admiring our navels / we have been capitalized and marketed," yet proffered the suggestion "but through realizing our socialization / might we be able to transform our reality?"³⁸ The issue of "realizing our socialization" was, for Burn, indivisible from questioning the political and economic system within which the art system operated:

The emergence of the international art market along its present lines has been incontestably an arm of a necessary expansion of the United States capitalist system and consolidation of marketing areas after the Second World War... the consolidation of the business of art intuitively followed the lines of the model of bureaucratic corporate industry. This doesn't mean we have a concretized bureaucracy; it means the people running the various parts of the business of art, indeed ourselves, have internalized the bureaucratic method so that it now seems 'natural' to separate functions, roles, relationships from the people who perform (etc.) them. So we intuitively achieve the corporate spirit of bureaucratic organization without any of its overt structures; by such means our 'high culture' has reified itself in a remote and dehumanizing tradition.³⁹

By emphasising from the beginning the problem of systemic interrelation (systems art—art system—social system/s—capitalist system) rather than institutional boundaries, systematic conceptual art can be seen as a productive artistic attempt to "realize our socialisation." In this sense, viewing the history of conceptual art through its systematic mode is preferable to constructions that

lay claim to a tradition of institutional critique. The institution addressed by institutional critique is simply the infrastructural form of the structural social relations and social contexts constituting art, relations and contexts that were first thematised by systematic conceptual art. Given the loss of the (relative) autonomy of traditional museological institutions to global corporate capital, pursuing a strategy seeking to preserve an “institution of critique” is to underestimate the broader structural challenges that impinge on the production of autonomous art from within the confines of an emergent art industry.

Kontext Künstlers versus Artistes Relationnels

In 1993 the art historian and critic James Meyer organised an exhibition at the American Fine Arts Gallery in New York entitled “What Happened to the Institutional Critique?” including the artists Andrea Fraser, Gregg Bordowitz, Tom Burr, Mark Dion, Renée Green and Christian Phillip Müller. Almost as if in response to Meyer’s question, Peter Weibel curated an exhibition in the same year entitled “Kontext Kunst. The Art of the Nineties,” including all but one of the artists in Meyer’s show within his own more extended survey.⁴⁰ Weibel’s exhibition, and the extensive catalogue essay that he wrote in support of it, though controversial—in that it grouped together a fairly disparate group of artists under the same banner and sought to take the credit for the grouping—is nevertheless broadly accepted as the moment at which “context art” crystallized as a critical term.⁴¹

What was distinctive about context art such that it could apparently be curatorially coded as both a continuation and a development of institutional critique? As was discussed above, institutional critique is a retroactive critical term developed out of the Whitney Independent Study program context from which many of the generation of context artists (Fraser, Bordowitz, Dion) emerged. Indeed, Weibel at least situates context art within the wider problematic of the social construction of art.⁴² In a certain sense then, institutional critique, as a coherent movement rather than a coherent strategy, is a phantom effect of the emergence of the generation of context artists. Just as we have put pressure on the adequacy of the term institutional critique so it is

imperative to subject context art to similar scrutiny. The distinguishing feature of context art is often held to be that it developed the notion of institutional critique by renouncing the assumption that the artist maintained a critical distance from the art institution subjected to critique. Isabelle Graw exemplifies the way in which such a reconceptualisation is held to function:

The term ‘critique’ has undergone... semantic shifts and practice-oriented reconceptualizations. For an earlier generation, such as Hans Haacke, the concept of critique seemed to depend on an ideal of critical distance. Younger artists, including Andrea Fraser, Christian Phillip Müller, Renée Green, and Fareed Armaly... based their work, in part, on an awareness that this assumption of distance or separation between the agent of the delivery of critique and its purported object has always been a fiction that could not and should not be reproduced in current circumstances. Their work proposed a renegotiated notion of critique based on the admission that ‘critical distance’ is compromised a priori.⁴³

Context art, then, is an art practice that apparently addresses Ramsden’s critique of Haacke’s systems art—existing in the same space as the institutions it claims to be fighting—by making a virtue of it.

Yet this issue is more complex than Graw’s developmental account would suggest. Haacke’s work was always dialectically sophisticated, always aware of the way in which it consisted of both “framing and being framed” and Fraser’s account of institutional critique has recognised this fact, asserting that “first generation” institution critique artists never simply took up an ideal of critical distance.⁴⁴ Just because Haacke did not formally thematise the social and economic grounds of his own practice it does not follow that he was not conscious of them. One of the questions in Haacke’s *John Weber Gallery Visitors’ Profile* (1973) [Fig.40] asked visitors to the show “Do you think the preferences of those who financially back the art world influence the kind of work artists



Fig.40. Hans Haacke, *John Weber Gallery Visitors' Profile* (1973).

produce?” The majority of polled visitors answered this question affirmatively (either “yes, a lot” or “somewhat”) and we can assume that Haacke realised the likelihood of such an outcome in posing the question in the first place. Haacke did not exempt his own practice from the influence exerted by the financial backers of the art world. This is precisely the reason why Ramsden accuses Haacke of being a reformist liberal. For Ramsden, Haacke was attempting an immanent critique of the art system and thus giving up on the possibility of fundamental social change in the wider social system which would change the art system from without. “Has adventurous New York art of the seventies... become a function of the market system?” Ramsden demanded, concluding, “‘art and politics’ becomes one more thing subsumed as part of Modern Art’s internal complexity.”⁴⁵

Explicitly developing a critique of the vocabulary of systems theory, and thus indirectly invoking Haacke’s practice, Ramsden went on to speculate that “one of the best ways to maintain a system’s insular self-preservation is to continuously try and increase its internal complexity, hence its steering capacity, while decreasing the complexity of its environment.”⁴⁶ Sarah Charlesworth was even more emphatic in her assertion that the artist was implicated in the art system: “We are ourselves, individually and collectively, the constitutive agents of the social complex that defines the values and significance of our work. In the same way that we as artists are *responsible* for the notion of art, by the formulation of art works or concepts, we are in turn responsible to the culture itself in the formulation of the notion and function of art.”⁴⁷

All these examples then challenge Graw's assertion that first generation institutional critique was marked by a belief in an ideal of "critical distance" and that context art's specificity could therefore be secured by relinquishing critical distance in favour of some more self-consciously "implicated" stance. As Juliane Rebentisch recognises "criticism by artists *since the 1970s*" was "no longer articulated from some revolutionary standpoint, but quite literally from within."⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it is perhaps in making a virtue of its own systemic entanglements within the *form* of the artwork that context art can be said to distinguish itself from earlier institutional critique as a practice. Fraser herself is one of the most incisive theorists of context art and an important example of her theoretical work was her attempt to codify professional best practice for context art (for which a historical parallel can be found in Seth Siegelaub's Artists's Transfer and Reserved Rights Agreement). Organised in conjunction with Helmut Draxler, *Services: Conditions and Relations of Project Oriented Artistic Practice* (1994) [Fig.41] was both an art project and a touring exhibition presenting the work. Fraser's "Services" project was thus novel and hyper self-reflexive in that it comprised an exhibition presenting the work of a working group aimed at elaborating a contractual model for the production of the (service rather than goods-based) work that was presented in the exhibition.

As Fraser and Draxler recognised, the need for such a contractual codification of service-based work emerged from the historical "success," that is to say



Fig.41. Andrea Fraser, *Services* (1994).

reification, of institutional critique: “While curators are increasingly interested in asking artists to produce work in response to specific existing or constructed situations, the labour necessary to respond to those demands is often not recognized or adequately compensated.”⁴⁹ In other words the success and consequent institutional assimilation of post-object, institutionally critical practices left the contemporary practitioners of Institutional Critique effectively exploited by the institution they were held to be critiquing (since their artistic practice no longer involved petty commodity production that could be sold on the art market, artists specialising in institutional critique became dependent on fees for critique). Fraser acknowledged the risks that directly contracting to art institutions presents to artists’ “relative freedom from the functionalization of our activity” but resolves this issue by insisting that traditional object-producing studio practice only obscured the degree to which artists were “always already serving:”

As long as the system of belief on which the status of our activity depends is defined according to a principle of autonomy which bars us from pursuing the production of specific social use value, we are consigned to producing only prestige value. If we are always already serving, artistic freedom can only consist in determining for ourselves—to the extent that we can—who and how we serve. This is, I think, the only course to a less contradictory principle of autonomy.⁵⁰

The problem here is that Fraser’s conception of artistic autonomy lacks any recognition of the fact that autonomous art had always involved wrestling autonomy from a necessary moment of heteronomy. This is because Fraser understands autonomy narrowly as something like purposelessness, the absence of “specific social use value.” Fraser here again mistakes the autonomy of art

for the autonomy of the artist—it is at the level of the individual artwork that the autonomy of art is established, or not. There is something deeply questionable in Fraser’s claim that artists should aim to construct “a less contradictory principle of autonomy” by directing the “uses to which artistic activity is put and the interests it serves.” Given that art’s autonomy was afforded by its character as a commodity (and notwithstanding the fact that art’s commodity status has also always pulled it toward heteronomy) by returning art to direct relations of patronage by the art institution, Fraser and others risk constructing not a “less ideological” form of autonomy but rather producing art of a thoroughly dependent, neo-feudal character. The desire for “a less contradictory principle of autonomy” is a misunderstanding of the necessarily contradictory character of artistic autonomy.

How does context art *en tout* (as theorised by Fraser at least) escape generalising the reformist tendencies with which Ramsden charged Haacke’s practice? The *Services* project does look like a form of bargaining for something like improved conditions of labour. Perhaps immanent critique is perceived to be the only possible strategy given the apparent foreclosure of the possibility of radical social change? Given that context art is the “kunst der neunziger Jahre” then it is necessarily an art marked by the post-1989 collapse of actually existing Communism and the global extension of neoliberal capitalism that was to follow in its wake. Does this perhaps make context art’s attempt at an immanent critique more plausible than first generation institutional critique’s when the possibility of fundamental and even revolutionary social change did

not appear foreclosed? The tensions within Fraser's practice figure broader tensions within context art as a whole.

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If context art was initially labelled, precipitously, the “art of the 90s” then with the emergence of relational art this claim came to require qualification.⁵¹ The widespread institutional success and rapid institutional assimilation of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, as a theory of relational art, retrospectively changed the landscape of nineties art. Consequently, context art could now be considered the dominant art of the early- to mid-nineties while relational art must be considered the dominant art of the mid- to late-nineties. Yet it should also be noted that both tendencies, and the tensions between them, were articulated throughout the nineties—such a periodisation marks only their relative artworld prominence. The grounds of the tension between relational and context art as response complexes were set out in chapter one in terms of their differing views on the viability of the available strategies for critical contestation. Gillick summarised these as “transparency” for context art (self-reflexive immanent critique) versus “meanderings” for relational art (oblique immanent critique). Walعاد Beshty corroborates Gillick's account of a break between context and relational art:

This shift appears induced by an intellectual paralysis concerning the patterns and strategies available for contestation. From a theoretical perspective, classical models of critical opposition provide an untenable set of compromises, between institution and practitioner, between the opening up or revealing of dominant structures, and the counter adoption of didactic prescription, or more precisely, one conducive to the reification of inherently problematic subject positions constructed from positions of dominance (i.e.

one must assume the voice of authority in order to contest it), which re-subordinates the viewer.⁵²

Beshty precisely diagnoses the “reification of inherently problematic subject positions” that inheres within Fraser’s concept of context art as a defence of the “institution of critique.” Relational art constitutes itself in part by its rejection of the idea of self-reflexive immanent critique proposed by context art, considering it a reification of critique. Yet the counter-charge to relational art is that it simply fails, in its amorphousness, to develop any meaningful critique at all and is thus *de facto* affirmative of the status quo, as Beshty also notes:

In the rejection of strategies of Institutional Critique, which always reasserted the material conditions of space, the Relational Aesthetics conception of social interaction mirrors the recent shift in urban planning’s understanding of the city... The understanding... of these evolutions of subjectivity and space are important to consider in re-examining the subjectivity of the viewer, and how control can be disrupted, but relational aesthetics seems to go only so far as recreate these systems, literalize their movements, *without providing any moments of resistance*.⁵³

It is important to reassert that individual artists’ practices do not necessarily conform to the critical categories that they come to be historicised under. Rirkrit Tiravanija’s work is central to Bourriaud’s account of relational art but Beshty insists that the uncanniness of Tiravanija’s work destabilises the affirmative character of relational aesthetics, noting that this facet of the artist’s practice is not represented in Bourriaud’s account of it, precisely because it does not fit the model of convivial social relations there advanced.⁵⁴

Similarly we could object that Liam Gillick (another of Bourriaud’s preferred artist exemplars) is fundamentally concerned with the problem of providing “moments of resistance.” Gillick insists on this motivation in the introduction to

his recently published collected writings: “How are we going to behave?... was a key question for some in the early 1990s, and the legacy of such an inquiry is still playing out in an increasingly striated art context. This... is a reflection of an ongoing collective discourse that attempted to escape from the hierarchical neo-conservatism of the 1980s without a return to the straightforward social mirroring of more strident forms of institutional critique.”⁵⁵ Here then Gillick insists on his determination to pursue a critical strategy but without submitting to the strategies of “social mirroring” that he asserts characterise context art. If context art charges that relational art provides no moments of resistance then relational art’s response is to note the ineffectiveness of resistance conceived on the traditional model of negation.

Part of the problem here is that the category of relational art is too narrowly assumed to be adequately described by Nicolas Bourriaud’s rendering of it in *Relational Aesthetics*. Just as systems art need not be theorised by taking up Burnham’s account of a systems aesthetics, so relational art need not be understood exclusively through relational aesthetics. Though this is always the case with any theory of an art “movement,” the issue is all the more acute for Bourriaud since he also acted as the curator of many of the shows in which “relational” artists first appeared, raising the spectre of a conflict of interests. Here relational aesthetics looks as much like the theoretical justification of Bourriaud’s curatorial protocols as it does a convincing account of relational art. With the rise of the curator also comes the rise of the theory of curating and, with it, the conflation of curatorial and critical discourse.

Though only appearing in English translation in 2002, *Relational Aesthetics* represents an amalgam of essays originally written by Bourriaud on nineties art. The first texts were originally published in *Documents sur l'art* in 1995 and were assembled and published in France in 1998 as *Esthétique relationnelle*. Bourriaud's text has, in reception, taken on the curious quality of constituting a work of art criticism, art theory and art history. The problems here are evident. Initially we will outline Bourriaud's high-level claims and the high-level criticisms that they have received. By briefly rehearsing these issues, it becomes clear that Bourriaud's work requires deeper historical contextualisation. This historical contextualisation, once established, will form the ground of a more substantive critical engagement.

Bourriaud has produced four works of art theory, the aforementioned *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998)/*Relational Aesthetics* (2002) as well as *Formes de vie: L'Art moderne et l'invention de soi* (1999), *Postproduction* (2002) and *The Radicant* (2009).⁵⁶ *Relational Aesthetics* has received most critical attention but it is through *Postproduction* that the clearest outline of Bourriaud's position emerges (*Formes de vie* constitutes a piecemeal account of the historical precursors to relational art, set within Bourriaud's version of the genealogy of modernist art while *The Radicant* constitutes a substantial extension of Bourriaud's position and thus goes beyond the scope of a discussion of relational aesthetics). In interview, he has stated:

In... Post-Production, the idea is that art has definitively reached the tertiary sector—the service industry—and that art's current function is to deal with things that were created elsewhere, to recycle and duplicate culture. Art production now indexes the service industry and immaterial economy more than heavy industry (as it did with Minimalism). Artists provide access to certain regions of the visible, and the objects they make become more and more secondary. They don't really "create" anymore, they reorganize...The common point between relational aesthetics and Post-Production is this idea

that to communicate or have relations with other people, you need tools.
Culture is this box of tools.⁵⁷

Bourriaud further elaborates on the ‘common point’ between his theoretical works in his introduction to *Postproduction*:

Relational Aesthetics, of which this book [Postproduction] is a continuation, described the collective sensibility within which new forms of art have been inscribed. Both take their point of departure in the changing mental space that has been opened for thought by the Internet, the central tool of the Information Age we have entered. But Relational Aesthetics dealt with the convivial and interactive aspects of this revolution (why artists are determined to produce models of sociality, to situate themselves within the interhuman sphere), while Postproduction apprehends the forms of knowledge generated by the appearance of the Net (how to find one’s bearings in the cultural chaos and how to extract new modes of production from it).⁵⁸

According to Bourriaud then, the context-specific practices of ‘relational’ artists deal not only with art’s relation to the attenuated social relations attending new forms of capitalist production in the West—“Art production now indexes the service industry and immaterial economy” —but also with the technological forces inflecting these relations and shaping their social subjects— “the changing mental space that has been opened for thought by the Internet, the central tool of the Information Age we have entered.”⁵⁹ The first of these two key points has been widely commented upon, the second less so. Here then we find Bourriaud returning to the dialectic of the forces and relations of production that occupied Adorno and Marcuse and which have been central to debates around the viability of a Marxist and post-Marxist art history.

Jacques Rancière, Hal Foster, Claire Bishop, Eric Alliez and Stewart Martin have all criticised the political and theoretical claims of Bourriaud’s work.⁶⁰ Rancière is prepared to leave open the question of the critical and political

effectiveness of relational art: “It’s as if the shrinking of public space and the effacement of political inventiveness in a time of consensus gave a substitutive political function to the mini-demonstrations of artists, to their collections of objects and traces, to their mechanisms of interaction, to their provocations in situ or elsewhere. Knowing if these substitutions can recompose political spaces, or if they must be content to parody them, is certainly one of the questions of today.”⁶¹ Foster, however, is more circumspect: “To some readers such ‘relational aesthetics’ will sound like a truly final end of art. to be celebrated or decried. For others it will seem to aestheticise the nicer procedures of our service economy... There is the further suspicion that, for all its discursivity, ‘relational aesthetics’ might be sucked up in the general movement for a ‘post-critical’ culture...”⁶²

Bishop wonders about the *quality* of the social relations produced by relational aesthetics: “If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?”⁶³ She concludes that Bourriaud misleadingly promotes relational art as a micro-utopian domain (claiming to produce salvific social relations that counter an otherwise pervasive alienation) but objects that: “the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic... since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness.”⁶⁴ Bishop prefers, in contrast, a model of antagonistic relations (derived from the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe) which recognises the tension inherent to both art and society.

Eric Alliez focuses on critiquing Bourriaud's "obstinate *recuperation* of Deleuze and Guattari (but above all of Guattari)," demonstrating that Deleuze and Guattari's work in fact anticipates and indicts the terms of Bourriaud's project: "relational aesthetics is the *postproduction brand* corresponding to that moment, diagnosed and denounced by Deleuze and Guattari, when 'the only events are exhibitions and the only concepts are products that can be sold.'" ⁶⁵

Stewart Martin questions how relational art's micro-utopian and purportedly autonomous relations escape heteronomous determination by the broader social relations they are necessarily inscribed within: 'If... *Relational Aesthetics* is pre-eminently a theory of art as a form of social exchange, then the crucial question that must follow in order to consider its relation to commodification, is: how does relational art's form of social exchange relate to the form of capitalist exchange?' ⁶⁶ Noting that Bourriaud proposes an 'autonomous art of the social,' Martin cannot find sufficient evidence of how this autonomy is achieved out of the dependent 'capitalist exchange relations that... broadly encompass relational art.' ⁶⁷ These are all legitimate critiques. It is far from clear whether Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics, is equipped to answer them.

Yet while these critics have mounted stringent and perceptive criticisms of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics none of them have put the strong claim Bourriaud makes for the historical *novelty* of relational art centre-stage. ⁶⁸ It is worth emphasising just how strong a claim this is: "We find ourselves, with relational artists, in the presence of a group of people who, for the first time

since the appearance of conceptual art in the mid-sixties, *in no way* draw sustenance from any re-interpretation of this or that past aesthetic moment. Relational art is not the revival of *any movement*, nor is it the comeback of *any style*.⁶⁹

Periodisation: After Postmodern Art

Bourriaud insists that the relational art of the 1990s constituted something genuinely “new;” not merely another “neo” act of recovery vis-à-vis the unfinished project of a 60s art movement, but something historically unprecedented. Bourriaud has also insisted that such genuinely new art demanded a genuinely new critical approach, one which “ceased to take shelter behind sixties’ art history”⁷⁰ Bourriaud claimed to have just such an innovative methodological approach to hand in his own analyses of relational art. Yet Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics does not represent anything genuinely “new” at all.

Having revisited Burnham’s systems aesthetics in detail in chapter three we are in a position to age Bourriaud’s theory by demonstrating its atavistic characteristics. Andrea Fraser and Hal Foster have challenged the originality of relational art, but neither makes a particularly convincing case. Fraser’s claim that relational art constitutes a “Neo-Fluxus” moment does not persuade though she is correct to look for the genealogy of relational art in the 60s.⁷¹ Still less persuasive is Foster’s genealogical role call: nouveau réalisme, arte povera and institutional critique.⁷² Such claims are not convincing because relational art does not conceive its social relations on the model of the Fluxist event, nor does it advance everyday objects or humble materials as themselves artistic in the manner of nouveau réalisme or arte povera. The invocation of institutional critique is closer to the mark but relational art, as we have discussed, distinguished itself from context art precisely by distancing itself from

institutional critique. Bourriaud claims that relational art has definitively reached the tertiary sector—in other words relational art does not claim to challenge its mediating institutions in any way that would permit comparison with institutional critique.

The fundamental claim that Bourriaud makes for the novelty of relational art can be summarised in two related moments. For Bourriaud, what is “new” about relational art is that it: (i) produces social relations as art; and, in so doing, (ii) harmonises artistic and social technique. Elaborating the first moment of this claim, Bourriaud asserts that relational art constitutes “A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”⁷³ Developing the second moment of this claim, Bourriaud states that the “*operational realism* which underpins many contemporary practices” consists in the relational artwork’s “wavering between its traditional function as an object of contemplation, and its more or less virtual inclusion in the socio-economic arena.”⁷⁴

Yet in “Systems Esthetics” Burnham had identified both the production of social relations and the harmonisation of artistic and social technique in the art of the 1960s. As was discussed in chapter three, Burnham asserted that “art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and the components of their environment” and also that “in an advanced technological culture the most important artist best succeeds by liquidating his position as artist vis-à-vis society.”⁷⁵ Burnham also situated his argument about paradigm

changes in art within the larger context of paradigm changes in advanced industrial society: “We are now in transition from an *object-oriented* to a *systems-oriented* culture. Here change emanates, not from things, but from the way things are done.”⁷⁶ Burnham’s position preceded Bourriaud’s arguments about relational art’s response to the “Information Age” by thirty years. Consequently, we can situate relational art within precisely that context which Bourriaud insists it is to be most strongly distinguished (a “past aesthetic moment”) and using tools he expressly disavows (“sixties’ art history”).

Context art recognises that it evolved out of the complex historical legacy of institutional critique. How then is Bourriaud able to make spurious claims concerning the novelty of relational art, claims which manifestly ignore the history of postformalist art? The simple answer to this question is that Burnham’s theory of systems aesthetics is absent from the mainstream historical record.⁷⁷ The reasons why it is absent open on to the more substantive reason for Burnham’s relative obscurity, namely the obfuscations generated by the emergence of postmodernist art theory.

As we have argued, although Burnham was prominent in the 1960s artworld, his relative contemporary obscurity is due in part to his own conviction that his theoretical work lost its critical character; that it grew old and died. Internal tensions within his own theory caused Burnham reject it. The tensions in Burnham’s theory were generated by his awkward elision of “systems” concepts drawn from both Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s positivist General Systems Theory and the explicitly anti-positivist Frankfurt School tradition, mediated through

Burnham's engagement with Marcuse's aesthetics. Burnham however always acknowledged the contingency of his theory of postformalist art— "The emergence of a 'post-formalist esthetic' may seem to some to embody a kind of absolute philosophy, something which... cannot be transcended. Yet... new circumstances will with time generate other major paradigms for the arts."⁷⁸ It was the emergence of postmodernism as a "major paradigm" which definitively aged Burnham's systems aesthetics, obscuring what remained of value within it, namely that in Burnham's awkward syncretic theoretical endeavour he mediated an *alternative modernism* to Greenberg's.

The stakes here are higher than contesting the originality of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics via a historical recovery of Burnham's systems aesthetics. Bourriaud has also recently sought to elaborate a broader theory of "altermodernism," set out in the catalogue to his recent Tate exhibition "Altermodernism" (2009) and his latest theoretical text *The Radicant*. Here Bourriaud has developed claims first outlined in *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*. Having seriously raising the question of the "new" in relation to contemporary art, however unsubstantiated his claim may be, Bourriaud has moved on to argue for the possibility of a change in the regnant artistic paradigm, a movement beyond the post-postmodern "paradigm-of-no-paradigm" that Hal Foster, until recently, gave as the definition of the contemporary cultural moment.⁷⁹ Rather than pursue Bourriaud's theory of altermodernism here we have focused on a historical contextualisation of his claims. Yet any comprehensive critique of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics is obliged at least to acknowledge the recently inflated terms of his theoretical

project. Bourriaud's work lacks an awareness, or an acknowledgment, of the genealogy of relational art and of the historical debates around modernism of which it is but the latest symptom. Bourriaud should thus be encouraged to hold to his own insight that "the 'now' factor, which we are using under the name of the contemporary' is 'absolutely inseparable from the notion of modernism.'"80

If "postmodernism" is no longer adequate as a periodising term for contemporary art, one could argue, with Bourriaud, that it was the artistic developments of the 1990s, principally relational and context art that, in reacting against those 80s practices most strongly associated with artistic postmodernism (neo-expressionist painting, appropriation, installation), brought this situation about. Here the modernism/postmodernism dyad, one that has proved extremely tenacious would be superseded, and replaced by a triadic temporal succession of culturally periodising categories running: modernism—postmodernism—altermodernism. In this Bourriaudian schema, altermodernism apparently succeeds postmodernism, reprising modernism in line with contemporary spatial and temporal exigencies: "The time seems ripe to reconstruct the "modern" for the present moment, to reconfigure it for the specific context in which we are living... Let us bet on a modernity which, far from absurdly duplicating that of the last century, would be specific to our epoch and would echo its problematics: an altermodernity, if we dare to coin the term..."81 In Bourriaud's schema, relational art emerges as the first artistic practices that could be described as "altermodern."

Yet, as we have shown, relational art and context art in fact remain within the terms of the artistic problem complex addressed by systematic conceptual art. These problems—*the residually aesthetic presentation of the artwork; the ontologically constitutive role of the situation for the artwork; the relation of artistic and social technique; the relationship of art to the art system; the relationship of the art system to other social systems*—have simply resurfaced in more recent “relational” and “context” art. Bourriaud’s theory of altermodernism was pre-dated by Burnham’s alternative modernism which was itself elaborated from his (incomplete) reception of Frankfurt School modernism mediated via Marcuse.

The contemporary reprise of modernism throws into question whether (artistic) postmodernism ever constituted a meaningful periodising concept. As Osborne has suggested “The problem with this periodization [postmodernism]... is that it fails to endow the complexly interacting set of anti-‘modernist’ artistic strategies of the 1960s with either sufficient conceptual determinacy and distinctness or adequate historical effectivity.”⁸² On this account artistic “postmodernism” was never adequate as an artistic periodisation, precisely because it developed as the abstract negation of a narrow (Greenbergian) conception of modernism: “It has become conventional to periodize the art of the past fifty years in terms of a transition from ‘modernism’ to ‘postmodernism’ – however vaguely or varyingly the second of these two terms is understood in this context. (Greenberg’s critical hegemony has tended to fix the meaning of the first term, albeit in a conceptually and chronologically restrictive manner, and thereby to open up the field of the ‘postmodern’ as the space of its abstract negation).”⁸³

Osborne has also expanded on the oversight that resulted from Greenberg's concept of modernism becoming hegemonic: "This is the problem of the relationship between two quite distinct, if none the less interconnected conceptions of modernism: a stylistic, formalistic, or what might be called an 'art historical' conception of modernism, derived in most part, within the visual arts, from the work of Clement Greenberg; and a far wider (socio-cultural) and deeper (aesthetico-philosophical) conception of modernism, such as is to be found... in the work of the Frankfurt School and other theorists from within the German tradition."⁸⁴ In this account, Greenberg's New York artworld hegemony obscured a more substantive European conception of modernism. Here, Greenberg not only stole the idea of modern art from Europe but also damaged it in transit.⁸⁵ As Osborne notes "A philosophically adequate conception of modernism as a temporal logic of cultural forms would embrace the whole sequence; 'postmodernism' being the misrecognition of a particular stage in the dialectic of modernisms."⁸⁶

For Osborne, the foremost shortcoming of the modernism/postmodernism dyad, above and beyond postmodernism's narrow misconstrual of "modernism" as Greenbergian formalism, was the way in which it obscured the critical significance of conceptual art, missing the fact that conceptual art created an ontologically distinctive rupture in the definition of art which was constitutive for all art after conceptual art. Hence Osborne proposes "an alternative periodisation for art after modernism that privileges the sequence modernism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art over the modernist/

postmodernist couplet, and treats the conceptual/post-conceptual trajectory as the standpoint from which to totalize the wide array of other anti-‘modernist’ movements – where ‘modernism’ is used here in its restrictive and ultimately mystifying, but nonetheless still critically ‘actual,’ Greenbergian sense.”⁸⁷

We can expand Osborne’s periodisation of the visual arts in line with the argument presented here such that it reads formalism/postformalism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art. “Modernism” is thus split into Greenbergian formalist modernism (“formalism”) and post-Greenbergian postformalist modernism (“postformalism”). This clarifies the otherwise “mystifying” character of Greenbergian “modernism” while retaining the critical priority and ontological distinctiveness of the conceptual art/post-conceptual art trajectory which is characterised by the four modes of conceptual art discussed in chapter four. This periodisation of the visual arts (formalism/postformalism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art) itself sits under a broader *cultural* periodisation characterised by the dialectic of modernisms.

An issue with abandoning the term “postmodernism” as an adequate description of developments in art is that it begs the question of how to account for developments in architecture, literature and music, all of which have been central to the definition of “postmodernism” but which have no mediating disciplinary analogue to “conceptual art.” This would seem to disbar the sequence modernism/conceptual art/post-conceptual art from any claim to a wider cultural periodisation across the various arts and yet this is precisely the ground occupied by postmodernism in its canonical Jamesonian articulation,

namely a theory of the *cultural logic* of late capitalism. Jameson's paradigm attempts to describe the socio-cultural and aesthetico-philosophical significance of postmodern culture in a way that goes beyond the mere abstract negation of Greenbergian modernism that was carried through by the postformalist art of the late 60s and early 70s.⁸⁸

Rather than attempt to construct alternative cultural periodisations for music, literature and architecture, here we will focus on demonstrating some of the problems with Jameson's conception of a postmodern art: it is in Jameson's treatment of conceptual art, and Hans Haacke's conceptual art in particular, that his overarching postmodern paradigm reveals theoretical fractures. Though he is acutely conscious of the problems with any attempt at constructing a totalizing system, Jameson insists on the necessity of "some conception of a new systematic cultural norm" precisely in order that radical cultural politics have a clear point of critical orientation.⁸⁹ For Jameson, postmodern culture can be characterized by its thoroughgoing commodification, the collapse of any distinction between culture and the culture industry:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the varied kinds of institutional support available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage.⁹⁰

He nevertheless asserts "I am very far from feeling that all cultural production today is 'postmodern.'"⁹¹ Such an admission seems necessary if Jameson wants

to hold on to an emphatic concept of art given that, on his account, postmodern “aesthetic production” is no longer able to ground such a claim. Yet this immediately raises the problem of the possibility of postmodern art. Jameson stages this question, somewhat evasively, via the problem of politics in art. Here he uses conceptual art, and more specifically its later “political variant”, held to be exemplified by Haacke, as a case study. Jameson acknowledges that “To mention Haacke... is... to raise one of the fundamental problems posed by postmodernism generally... namely the possible political content of postmodernist art...”⁹²

For Jameson, Haacke disturbs the dominance of postmodernism’s cultural logic from *within* the paradigm: “his is a kind of cultural production which is clearly postmodern and equally clearly political and oppositional—something that does not compute with the paradigm and does not seem to have been theoretically foreseen by it.”⁹³ Thus Jameson asserts that Haacke’s “kind of cultural production” is “clearly postmodern” at the same time as admitting that Haacke’s work “does not compute with the paradigm.”

On such an account it remains unclear in what way Haacke’s work is postmodern, other than by being historically coincident with Jameson’s cultural periodisation. Rather than arguing persuasively for the possibility of a postmodern art (which already looked self-contradictory from the perspective of his own account of the postmodern condition) Jameson’s account of Haacke’s work actually undermines his own paradigm. Jameson later admits that Haacke’s work and the “political variant” of conceptual art more

generally, challenge his own totalising account of the deadly reciprocal legitimisation between commodified postmodern art and its systemically integrated postmodern institutions:

As for conceptual art and its evolution, however, it is worth adding that its later political variant—in the work of Hans Haacke, for example—redirects the deconstruction of perceptual categories specifically onto the framing institutions themselves... Indeed, in Haacke, it is not merely with museum space that we come to rest, but rather the museum itself, as an institution, opens up into its network of trustees, their affiliation with multinational corporations, and finally *the global system of late capitalism proper*, such that what used to be the limited and Kantian project of a restricted conceptual art expands into the very ambition of cognitive mapping itself (with all its specific representational contradictions).⁹⁴

Here then the “political variant” of conceptual art that Jameson acknowledges is what we have discussed as systematic conceptual art. However we have argued that systematic conceptual art, with Hans Haacke as its most advanced exponent, constituted an *alternative modernist* practice, one within which modernity began to become self-reflexive about its own social bases. Haacke’s stated determination to “critique the dominant systems of beliefs while employing the very mechanisms of that system” might well stand as an elegant summary of the project of a reflexive modernism, one concerned to reform (technological) reason on its own grounds.

Such a reading was intimated as early as 1975 by Jack Burnham in his most extensive essay on Haacke’s work “Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art.”⁹⁵ That an understanding of systematic conceptual art has not been more prominent in the critical literature on the art of the 1960s and 1970s is a function of both the obscurity visited upon Burnham’s work for its

unresolved syncretism and the obscurity that institutional critique has visited on the relationship between art, the art system and the wider social systems in which art inheres.

* * *

Towards a Genealogy of Contemporary Art

As the endgame(s) of postmodernism in art appear to have wound up, and the “altermodern” alternatives of relational and context art reveal themselves to be enmeshed in problems introduced by systematic conceptual art, the challenge is to better understand and theorise the conditions of art’s playing on (as art). Such a challenge depends, at least in part, on a deeper understanding of the historical overthrow of formalist modernism, that is with the birth of the “New Art” of the 1960s in reaction formation to a modernism most clearly identified with the prescriptions of Clement Greenberg.

This terrain, apparently so well covered by the historiography of Sixties art, continues to reveal patches of fresh ground. For while reaction against Greenbergian formalist modernism was clearly the primary determinant of the majority of the new art of the 1960s, there was a historically actual alternative modernism already in play in the 1960s, namely that pointed to, but not decisively theorised, by Jack Burnham’s conflation of postformalist motifs and the work of the Frankfurt School (specifically Marcuse) and more thoroughly developed in the work of systematic conceptual art, especially Haacke’s.

Here though we have sought to go beyond Jack Burnham’s theory of “systems aesthetics,” noting, amongst other shortcomings, its inability to account for conceptual art. Instead we have generated an original theoretical schema, drawing on conceptual artists’ own accounts of what was at stake in systematic conceptual art. The stress on conceptual art’s “systematic” mode has reoriented

the canonical focus, producing a more inclusive and more pertinent account of the conceptual character and critical legacy of conceptual art. The development of conceptual art has been situated within three broader contexts: philosophical (the ongoing problem of the character of modernity), economic (the transition from fordist to postfordist industrial production) and social (the trajectory of the New Left and the ramifications of the cultural revolution).

Conceptual art has been reconsidered in light of its nascence, emergence, consolidation and historical “overthrow.” The nascence of conceptual art has been relocated within the broader problematic of postformalism. The appearance of a distinctive “systems art” after the decline of minimalism (and out of a negotiated relationship between minimalism, pop and tech art) has been advanced as one of the contributing factors to the emergence of a distinctively “conceptual” art. We have shown the way in which the ideal systems of logical, mathematical and spatio-temporal relations that characterised early post-minimalist work were expanded in character to include physical, biological and, crucially, social systems. Conceptual art’s consolidation has been reconsidered by distinguishing its multiple modes, namely “stylistic,” “systematic,” “analytic” and “synthetic,” and the “systematic” mode of conceptual art has been argued to be of more contemporary relevance than the more critically established “analytic” mode. Finally, the “overthrow” of conceptual art has been revisited from the perspective of the present in order to demonstrate that contemporary context and relational practices revisit problems first articulated by systematic conceptual art. Recovering the systems genealogy and systematic mode of

conceptual art provides a richer genealogy of contemporary art. It is from systematic conceptual art that relational and context art inherit their focus on the social relations and the social context of art. It is this tradition that continues to set terms for the artistic debates that recur today and it is this tradition that any autonomous contemporary art will be obliged to negotiate.

Three immediate possibilities for future research are suggested by the conclusions we have drawn. First, to seek to test our systems genealogy of conceptual art against conceptual art beyond its Anglo-American articulation. Second, in light of the systems genealogy of contemporary art, to attempt to theorise the “context” and “relational” art of the 1990s more adequately. Third, to specify in greater detail the category of “contemporary” art.

(I) The scope of this thesis has been limited to what might be described as “canonical” conceptual art, that is conceptual art as it was elaborated in the Anglo-American context. Within this context we have argued for a further differentiation of the category, one which reorients our understanding of the scope of the problem complex that was engaged by conceptual art, with the result that a more inclusive categorisation of conceptual art has been developed. We have sought to intervene in the “canonical” category, drawing out its shortcomings in light of the reception of conceptual art by contemporary practices. Systematic conceptual art has been defined as a distinctive mode of conceptual art. As such we might well expect systematic conceptual art to relate to the practice of conceptual artists outside England and America. Further work could be done by testing the systematic mode of conceptual art against

other conceptual practices and traditions, perhaps most obviously those originating in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

(II) Having elaborated the systems genealogy of conceptual art as a significant mode, one that inflects the conceptual genealogy of contemporary art, and given our critique of the inadequacy of both Andrea Fraser and Nicolas Bourriaud's theorisation of context and relational art, the task of elaborating a more convincing theoretical schema for relational and context art presents itself. Such a schema might well go beyond the putative opposition of context and relational art, a division that is strongly advocated by Fraser but largely rejected by Bourriaud. Here then we would aim to outline a theory that was informed by the historical practices of conceptual artists but which also sought to capture what was specific about the post-postmodern relational and context art that emerged in the 90s and which continues to inflect the terms of contemporary art.

(III) The systems genealogy of contemporary art is not on its own sufficient to define contemporary art as a meaningful ontological and periodising category. Here we need to work out additional genealogies for contemporary art. If we understand contemporary art as distinctively post-conceptual then we can clearly identify three, post-movement specific, artistic strategies that understand themselves to have resulted from the "failure" of conceptual art:

- (i) "institutional critique" (the recognition that the ontology of art has to be thought by way of critical reflection on the institutions which enframe it);
- (ii) "installation" (the self-reflexive, if frequently uncritical, incorporation of the

specific context in which a work is realised within the terms of the work); and (iii) “participation” (the attempt to define a new model of the beholder in ways that go beyond kinetic and op art’s immediate experiential involvement of the audience in otherwise traditionally conceived works). Here we have sought to demonstrate that institutional critique fell within conceptual art proper, as part of its systematic mode. A similarly critical approach to the conceptual genealogy of installation and participation might also be developed in order to provide a more thorough specification of the post-conceptual character of contemporary art. Here, recalling Weiner’s joke, we might expect more surprises.

Chapter 1

¹ The quotation excerpted in the work is an abridged version of Marcuse's response to the question of what people might do in a liberated society, once achieved: "The answer which, I believe, strikes at the heart of the matter, was given by a young black girl. She said: for the first time in our life, we shall be free to think about what we are going to do." Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 91.

² Robert Barry, "Some Times: Press Release," <http://www.artnet.com/Galleries/Exhibitions.asp?gid=193&cid=101163>.

³ *Marcuse Piece* was recently included in the major Centre Pompidou exhibition "Voids: A Retrospective" (2009).

⁴ Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991, 107.

⁵ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, ix.

⁶ Ibid., viii; ix.

⁷ Ibid., 25. Marcuse later goes as far as to describe in some detail the social character of such a liberated future: "Socially necessary labour would be diverted to the construction of an aesthetic rather than repressive environment, to parks and gardens rather than highways and parking lots, to the creation of areas of withdrawal rather than massive fun and relaxation. Such redistribution of socially necessary labour (time), incompatible with any society governed by the Profit and Performance Principle, would gradually alter society in all its dimensions — it would mean the ascent of the Aesthetic Principle as a Form of the Reality Principle..." Ibid., 90.

⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 23.

⁹ For Marcuse's own discussion of his relation to the New Left, see Herbert Marcuse, "Problems of Violence and the Radical Opposition" in *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia*, trans. Jeremy J Shapiro (London: Allen Lane, 1970); Herbert Marcuse, "The Failure of the New Left?," trans. Biddy Martin, *New German Critique*, no.18 (Autumn 1979): 3–11.

¹⁰ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, xx.

¹¹ Deke Dusinberre, Seth Siegelaub, Daniel Buren and Michael Claura, "Working with Shadows, Working with Words," *Art Monthly*, December 1988/January 1989, 3–6, 3.

¹² Mary Kelly, "Interview: Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly," in *Mary Kelly*, ed. Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp and Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 8–30, 15.

¹³ Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), xxxviii–lii, xxxix.

¹⁴ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 49; 55.

¹⁵ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 27.

¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸ Marcuse explicitly acknowledges his "debt to the aesthetic theory of Theodor W. Adorno" in the acknowledgments to his last work, Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press), 1978, vii. First published as Herbert Marcuse, *Die Permanenz der Kunst: Wider eine bestimmte marxistische Aesthetik* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1977). The English translation of the title is misleading since a more literal translation ("The Permanence of Art") would have signalled more accurately Marcuse's retreat into a traditionalist aesthetics that is most notable for its departure from Adorno's commitment to the necessary dialectic between art and anti-art.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1985).

²² Caroline Jones has produced a detailed study of this "Greenberg effect," see Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005). Jones adduces a sociocultural reason for Greenberg's preeminence, linking his

disproportionate influence to a wider social 'bureaucratization of the senses' which Greenberg's work is held to represent. However her own work remains symptomatic in that it offers no corrective to the problems it so precisely diagnoses. If anything, Jones suggests Greenberg's criticism, or one like it, was inevitable, thus collapsing Greenberg's specificity into his social context and missing the significance of alternative modernisms to Greenberg's: "[F]ormalism was so successful because its project complemented the increasingly bureaucratic organization of the modernist sensorium as a whole." Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 389.

²³ For an insightful survey of the continuities and crucial differences between the aesthetic thought of these three thinkers, see Jürgen Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin," trans. Philip Brewster and Carl Howard Buchner, *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 30–59.

²⁴ For a detailed account of this issue, see Peter Osborne, "Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno, and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts," *New Formations* 9 (Winter 1989): 31–50.

²⁵ Hal Foster, "This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse," in *Design and Crime, and Other Diatribes* (London: Verso, 2002), 123–143, 128.

²⁶ More recently Foster has begun to outline a theory of "reflexive modernity" based on the work of Scott Lash, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. I discuss this in chapter five, n.75.

²⁷ On this issue see the various contributions collected in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

²⁸ Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), 55.

²⁹ "The premises on which fine art is distinguished from commercial art or forms of popular entertainment need to be articulated..." Johanna Drucker, *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163.

³⁰ Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, 24–25.

³¹ For an account of the issues involved here, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Brock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

³² Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, 67. My emphasis.

³³ Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (September 2004), 651–670, 663; Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, 67.

³⁴ John Roberts, "After Adorno: Art, Autonomy and Critique," *Historical Materialism* 7 (Winter 2000): 221–239, 223.

³⁵ Jeff Wall, "'Marks of Indifference:' Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in *Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 143–168, 150. My emphasis.

³⁶ Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, 267n7.

³⁷ Chantal Mouffe, "Carsten Höller and the Baudoin Experiment," *Parkett*, no. 77 (Zurich: Parkett Verlag, 2006), 52–61, 52.

³⁸ Analogously, for "artistic practices" we should also read "art historical practices." Art history must also test its own critical character and relationship to the productive apparatus of contemporary capitalism.

³⁹ Carsten Höller, "A Thousand Words," *Artforum*, March 1999, 103.

⁴⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris: les presses du réel, 2002), 109; 113.

⁴¹ For an account of Carsten Höller's work as context art, see, Liam Gillick, "Context Kunstlers," *Art Monthly*, June 1994, 10–12; Bourriaud discusses Höller's work throughout *Relational Aesthetics*.

⁴² "Interview of Miroslav Kulchitsky with Nicolas Bourriaud," <http://www.boiler.odessa.net/english/razl/nlrls02.htm>

⁴³ Liam Gillick, "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,'" *October*, no. 115 (Winter 2006) 95–106, 106.

⁴⁴ Walead Beshty, "Neo-Avantgarde and Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics," *Texte zur Kunst*, <http://www.textezurkunst.de/59/neo-avantgarde-and-service-industry/>. It should be acknowledged that *Texte zur Kunst* is implicated within this polemic, its editorial line comes out in support of Context art: "Die Geschichte der 'Kontext-

Kunst" ist eine Geschichte der Verwicklungen, Komplizenschaften, Aneignungen, an der Künstler, Galeristen, Kritiker, Kuratoren und Sammler (und schließlich auch unsere Zeitschrift)..." Stefan Germer, "Unter Geiern Kontext-Kunst im Kontext," *Texte zur Kunst*, August 1995, 95.

⁴⁵ Gillick, "Context Kunstlers," 11.

⁴⁶ Charles Harrison. 'Conceptual Art and its Criticism' in *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art and Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 35–48, 40.

⁴⁷ See Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting*, 27.

⁴⁸ Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms," in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 29–50, 47.

⁴⁹ Michael Newman, "Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An Unfinished Project?," in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 288–289, 289.

⁵⁰ Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 663.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For an account of the work, transcriptions of some of the artists' responses as well as installation shots from the exhibition, see Silvia Kolbowski, "An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art," *October* 92 (Spring 2000), 53–70.

⁵⁴ Kolbowski, 'An Inadequate History of Conceptual Art,' 53.

⁵⁵ Osborne, 'Art Beyond Aesthetics,' 663.

⁵⁶ Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), xxii; Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), x.

⁵⁷ Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), viii.

⁵⁸ Lippard, *Six years*, vii.

⁵⁹ Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," in Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, 218.

⁶⁰ Terry Atkinson, "Concerning the article 'The Dematerialization of Art,'" *Six Years*, 43; 44.

⁶¹ Lippard, *Six years*, 5.

⁶² "Because this is a book about widely differing phenomena within a time span, not about a 'movement,' there is no precise reason for certain inclusions and exclusions except personal prejudice and an idiosyncratic method of categorization that would make little sense on anyone else's grounds." Ibid.

⁶³ Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder," in *Essays on Art & Language*, 29–62.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 44–45.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From an Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, no. 55 (Winter, 1990): 105–143.

⁷¹ Ibid., 143; 142; 143. There is a question that remains unanswered as to how Buchloh understands "aesthetic experience" since his presentation glosses aesthetic experience as "an individual and social investment of objects with meaning" such that his account appears cognitive and therefore non-Kantian. Ibid., 134.

⁷² Ibid., 143.

⁷³ Such an outcome was not envisaged by Adorno for whom art remained the sole hope for opposition to the logic of administration and instrumental rationality.

⁷⁴ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 88.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 96. Here Wall's account of Adorno's thought suffers from its exclusive focus on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the exclusion of *Aesthetic Theory* (presumably as a result of its unavailability in English translation at the time of writing) with the result that Adorno's position is glossed as asserting that "the work of art becomes *completely* subjected to the repressive falsifications of the culture industry." Ibid., 88. My emphasis.

⁷⁷ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 29. It should be noted that this insight is also to be had from "The Culture Industry" chapter of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* itself.

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- ⁷⁸ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 97.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 98.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid., 103.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 101.
- ⁸⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 49.
- ⁸⁵ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 98.
- ⁸⁶ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969," 143.
- ⁸⁷ Harrison, "Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder," 62.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 17; 19.
- ⁹⁰ For an indication of Burnham's debt to Marcuse, see Jack Burnham, *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969).
- ⁹¹ Developing Weber's account of the individual motivations for pursuing capitalist endeavour by hybridising It with Albert Hirschman's account of the common motivations for capitalist endeavour, Boltanski and Chiapello have defined the spirit of capitalism in the following way: "We call the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism 'spirit of capitalism'." Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, trans. Gregory Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), 8.
- ⁹² Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 2.
- ⁹³ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 85–88.
- ⁹⁴ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 21.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.
- ⁹⁶ Foster, "This Funeral is for the Wrong Corpse," 128.
- ⁹⁷ Joseph Kosuth, "1975," *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966–1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 129–143, 130ff. First published in *The Fox*, no. 2 (1975): 87–96.
- ⁹⁸ For a thorough account of this issue, see Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 47–65.
- ⁹⁹ Jack Burnham, ed., *Software, Information Technology: It's New Meaning for Art* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1970), 68. Catalogue presented in conjunction with the exhibition "Software, Information Technology: It's New Meaning for Art" presented at the Jewish Museum, New York.
- ¹⁰⁰ For an account of Kosuth's (and Sarah Charlesworth's) ousting from Art & Language New York, and the splintering of the group as a whole, see, Michael Corris "Inside a New York Art Gang; Selected Documents of Art & Language, New York", *Conceptual Art A Critical Anthology*, 470–485, 480–482.
- ¹⁰¹ Liam Gillick, "Statements for A Lecture on Conceptual Art," in *Proxemics: Selected Writings (1988-2006)* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2006), 93–96, 96.
- ¹⁰² Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-69,' 107.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., 143.
- ¹⁰⁴ Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub, "Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art," *October*, no.57 (Summer 1991): 152–57, 157.
- ¹⁰⁵ Jack Burnham, 'Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art,' Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Frames: 7 Works 1970-75* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 127–41, 133.
- ¹⁰⁶ Newman, "Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s," 289.
- ¹⁰⁷ Alexander Alberro, "The Way Out is the Way In," in *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 13–25, 13.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 14.
- ¹⁰⁹ Alexander Alberro, "A Media Art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, 140–151, 151.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹¹ Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 5.
- ¹¹² Ibid., 3. For a critique of Alberro's claims in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, see Peter Osborne "Hard Sale: Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity – Book Review", *Artforum*, February 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_6_41/ai_98123121/
- ¹¹³ Sabeth Buchmann, "From Systems-Oriented Art to Biopolitical Art Practice," <http://publication.nodel.org/From-Systems-Oriented-Art-to-Biopolitical-Art-Practice>.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid..

¹¹⁵ Branden Joseph, "Concept Art and Instrumental Reason: On Tony Conrad's Early Work," *Texte Zur Kunst*, Winter 2005, 74–87, 79.

¹¹⁶ "Perhaps not coincidentally, those conceptual artists (unlike Kosuth) who engaged with the serial procedures described in *Die Reihe* would similarly turn against the tenets of logical positivism by which such procedures were justified... LeWitt and Graham embraced the dialectical condition as such in which rational processes "blindly" carried out produced paradoxical or irrational perceptual and material results..." Ibid., 83.

¹¹⁷ See Herbert Marcuse, "From Negative to Positive Thinking: Technological Rationality and the Logic of Domination" in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 144–169.

¹¹⁸ Liz Kotz, *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 175.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 194.

¹²¹ "One of the paradoxes of this period is that while in rapidly diffusing semiotic and structural models, photographic images—along with much else—came to be understood as structured "like a language," in visual art, language in many cases would be "like photography," as if it too could serve as a neutral recording apparatus, documenting the results of a preexisting system." Ibid., 218.

¹²² Osborne, *Conceptual Art*, 23.

¹²³ Lippard, *Six Years*, xv.

¹²⁴ Robert. C Morgan, "A Methodology for American Conceptualism," in *Art Into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13–32, 23.

¹²⁵ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 99.

¹²⁶ For a critic who was a significant force in his day—sitting on Artforum's masthead alongside Lawrence Alloway, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss—Burnham's work has become relatively obscure. Other scholars who have commented on his theoretical legacy include Edward Shanken (a longstanding advocate), Pamela Lee and Johanna Drucker. See Edward A Shanken, "The House That Jack Built: Jack Burnham's Concept of 'Software' as a Metaphor for Art," *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 6, no.10 (November, 1998); and Edward A Shanken, "Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art," in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris, 235–50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 70–77, 239–43; Johanna Drucker, "The Crux of Conceptualism: Conceptual Art, the Idea of Idea, and the Information Paradigm," in Corris, *Conceptual Art*, 251–68. The *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* conference at Tate Modern (16/09–19/09/05) produced two papers engaging Burnham's work: Sabeth Buchmann, "From Systems-Oriented Art to Biopolitical Art Practice," <http://publication.nodel.org/From-Systems-Oriented-Art-to-Biopolitical-Art-Practice>; Matthias Michalka, "Antagonistic Systems," (unpublished). A comprehensive resource of writing on Burnham can be found at <http://www.volweb.cz/horvitz/burnham/homepage.html>.

¹²⁷ Joseph Kosuth, "1975," in *Art After Philosophy and After*, 129–144, 132.

¹²⁸ Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell, eds., *Recording Conceptual Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Although only recently published Norvell's essays were all conducted between March and July 1969.

¹²⁹ Though he worked very closely with Haacke, Burnham did not formulate systems aesthetics only by considering Haacke's practice; Dan Flavin, Carl Andre and Robert Morris all feature heavily in his account and Burnham actually lists Les Levine as 'methodologically... the most consistent exponent of a systems aesthetic.' Jack Burnham, "Systems Aesthetics" in *Artforum*, September 1968, 34.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹³¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 113.

¹³² For a useful summary of this issue, see Stephen Bann, "Introduction" in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 1–13. Catalogue presented in conjunction with the exhibition "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s" presented at the Queens Museum of Art, New York.

¹³³ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 468.

Chapter 2

¹ Haacke did subsequently produce oil portraits of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and George Bush in *Oil Painting: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers* (1982), *Taking Stock* (1983-84) and *Eagle & Prey* (1992) respectively. However these works are conceived in light of their situation within a larger installation and function as pastiche: they do not attempt to develop painting as a medium, but rather to utilise it as the privileged signifier for an outmoded, medium-specific concept of art. Haacke has stated that in these works he “chose to paint because the medium has a particular meaning. It is almost synonymous with what is popularly viewed as Art...”; the artist has also acknowledged their “tongue-in-cheek” quality. Yve-Alain Bois, Douglas Crimp and Rosalind Krauss, “A Conversation with Hans Haacke,” in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Jon Bird, Walter Grasskamp, and Molly Nesbit (London: Phaidon Press, 2004), 114-123, 114; 118. Haacke also copied a piece of advertising imagery in a realist painterly style: *Alcan: tableau pour la salle du conseil d'administration* (1983). Here an appropriated image of Alcan's Canadian smelting plant was subverted by overlaying a caption on it revealing the health risks to which the company knowingly exposed its workers. Again, the “painting” works as a subversion, rather than continuation, of the medium.

² “Interview: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in conversation with Lawrence Weiner,” in *Lawrence Weiner*, ed. Alexander Alberro, Alice Zimmerman, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and David Batchelor (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 8–33, 9.

³ Jack Burnham, “Alice's Head,” in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 47–61, 53.

⁴ “How Can You Defend Making Paintings Now: A Conversation between Mel Bochner and James Meyer,” in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 199–204, 199.

⁵ Hans Haacke, diary entry, January 7th 1962, cited in Matthias Flügge and Robert Fleck, eds., *Hans Haacke – For Real: Works 1959-2006* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2006), 82. Compare Haacke's later statement of intent, originally produced for an exhibition announcement at Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf: “make something which experiences, reacts to its environment, changes, is nonstable...,” “Untitled statement” (1965), cited in *Hans Haacke*, 100.

⁶ Haacke had encountered the work of Zero and GRAV in Düsseldorf and Paris respectively. For a broadly contemporaneous account of the Zero group, see John Anthony Thwaites, “The Story of Zero,” *Studio International*, July 1965, 2–9. For an account of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel's aims, see GRAV, “Transforming the Current Situation of Plastic Art,” in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 725–27.

⁷ Morellet made a number of “grid” paintings between 1958-59, consisting of varying numbers of painted grids superimposed over each other at different angles of rotation.

⁸ Though Haacke rejected painting, Daniel Buren would demonstrate ways in which contextual relations could be explored through “painting,” broadly conceived.

⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *The New Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1966), 100–110; 104.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104. Greenberg does allow for “optical illusion,” but not perspectival recession, in his scheme, moderating his own claims about flatness.

¹² In this notorious action, Latham tore up, chewed to a pulp and then distilled his St Martin's College library copy of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, storing and exhibiting the resulting liquid in a glass phial. The intervention resulted in Latham's dismissal from his teaching post at the college.

¹³ For the classic study of the machinations involved in asserting an “independent” American art, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

¹⁴ Greenberg worked briefly for the appraiser's division of the customs service in the Port of New York. See Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 32.

¹⁵ Peter Wollen, “Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss, 73–85, 74. Catalogue presented in conjunction with the exhibition “Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s” shown at the Queen's Museum of Art, New York.

¹⁶ Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Alexander Alberro, Thierry de Duve, Martha Buskirk, Yve-Alain Bois, “Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp,” *October* 70 (Fall 1994): 126–46,

139. We might briefly outline an answer to Krauss' open question here with the proposal that Haacke develops an art which appropriates the system as a readymade, an issue that is treated in chapter 3 of this thesis.

¹⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 229.

¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Counter Avant-Garde," *Art International*, May 1971, 16–19, 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰ The full passage reads as follows and takes the form of a false inference, rather than the syllogism it believes itself to be: "it has become clearer... that any thing that can be experienced at all can be experienced esthetically; and that any thing that can be experienced esthetically can also be experienced as *art*. In short, art and the esthetic don't just overlap, they coincide." *Ibid.*, 18.

²¹ It is left to Michael Fried to provide the only plausible defence of formalist modernism at this stage. Fried's position is discussed substantively below.

²² Harold Rosenberg, "De-aestheticization," in *The De-Definition of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972) 28–38, 29.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37. Rosenberg's (slightly) later assessment of the achievements of the art of the late 1960's was less favourable: "Minimalist creations succeeded Pop art's exact approximations of things that are not art, and they were in turn displaced, seriatim, by Anti-Form art, Earth art, Process art, Conceptualist art, and Information art. The philosophies on which these movements were founded are extremely shaky, at time fatuous, and they have not lasted, though this does not affect the vanguard status of the movements themselves." Harold Rosenberg, "Myths and Rituals of the Avant-Garde," *Art International*, September 1973, 67–68, 67.

²⁶ Greenberg, "Counter Avant-Garde," 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ How minimal or earth art might be interpreted as *not* relying on "extrinsic context" is unclear to say the least.

²⁹ Greenberg, "Counter Avant-Garde," 19. My emphasis.

³⁰ Max Kozloff, "Critical Schizophrenia and the Intentionalist Method," in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1966) 123–35, 132. Kozloff's own proposal for an "intentionalist" criticism based on an "exploration of the intention of the artist" was not widely taken up (perhaps unsurprisingly, given his own acknowledgment of the inadequacies of intentionalist literary criticism).

³¹ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 40–41.

³² Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–44, Vol. I.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5–22, 22.

³³ Clement Greenberg, "Looking for the Avant-Garde," in *Late Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19–24, 22.

³⁴ Jones, *Eyesight Alone*, 364.

³⁵ Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 284–288, 285; 286.

³⁶ Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991), 8.

³⁷ Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment* was a decisive influence in the recovery of constructivism for many New York-based artists. See, Camilla Gray *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1962). For a sceptical account of the assimilation of constructivist precedent by Sixties artists, see Terry Fenton "Constructivism and its Confusions," *Artforum*, January 1969, 22–27.

³⁸ "Conceptual art, as well as Minimal art, was interested in what one calls reductiveness. One principle was that less is more. The idea was to reduce things—ideas, surface, content—to the point where they seemed to be blank or were tautologies, or had no obvious content in terms of representation or seemed not to be saying anything. They had no message. And yet behind the apparent black surface was often an incredible complexity. In literature, good examples are Michel Butor or Marguerite Duras or Robbe-Grillet, all of these French "nouveau roman" people, where it seemed everything was reduced to simple geometric ciphers." Dan Graham, *Two Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 67.

³⁹ Following Thomas McEvilly, Morellet "provides... a link between European Geometric Abstraction and Conceptual Art," see Thomas McEvilly, "Morellet's Pythagorean

Postmodernism” in *Morellet* (Künzelsau: Swiridorf Verlag, 2002), 207–13, 208. An exhibition catalogue.

⁴⁰ Observers had noted GRAV’s professed anti-compositional approach as early as 1963: “group members have disavowed all classical teachings of composition, even though those teachings are still evident in their works now and then.” Pierre Descargues, “Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel,” *Graphics* 105, January-February 1963, 72–80.

⁴¹ Julio Le Parc, “Untitled Statement,”

http://www.julioleparc.org/en/artwork.php?aw_cat_id=1, 20/07/07. English translation corrected by me.

⁴² For a detailed account of this incident, on which I have drawn, see Lynne Zelevansky, “Beyond Geometry: Objects, Systems, Concepts” in *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s-1970s*, ed. Lynne Zelevansky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 14–18.

⁴³ Haacke took part in the Zero group show, “nul,” at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam in 1962 as well as another Zero group show in 1965.

⁴⁴ Benjamin Buchloh, “Hans Haacke: The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment,” in Hans Haacke, “*Obra Social*” (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1995), 45–60, 47. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Hans Haacke: ‘Obra Social’” shown at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona.

⁴⁵ Thwaites, “The Story of Zero,” 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁴⁸ Georg Jappe, “Kinetic Art in Germany,” *Studio International*, October 1970, 123–29, 123.

⁴⁹ Willoughby Sharp, “Luminism and Kineticism,” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1968), 317–358, 317–318. My emphasis.

⁵⁰ Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 93–94.

⁵¹ Kinetic Art is significant both for its vanguard postformalism but also for its constitution as an emphatically international avant-garde. Kinetic art made a strong impact in the UK, Europe, the US, Latin America and elsewhere. Engaging with the problems presented by kinetic art proved of generative significance for a generation of artists seeking to move beyond artistic formalism. The Signals Gallery in London was a focal point of the international kinetic avant garde. Haacke published a notice of his early enthusiasm for the work of Takis in the Signals bulletin as well as announced his artistic proximity to the work of David Medalla. Signals was one of the first spaces to present the work of a generation of Latin American, specifically Brazilian, artists outside of their native continent, artists who would go on to be instrumental in defining Latin American Conceptual art.

⁵² Gustav Metzger, “Automata in History,” *Studio International*, March 1969, 107–109, 107.

⁵³ For a detailed, near-contemporary account of tech art, see Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology and Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973).

⁵⁴ Metzger, “Automata in History,” 107.

⁵⁵ For a critical review of Kepes’ centre, one developing Marcuse’s objections to technocratic thinking and technological rationality, see Jonathan Benthell, “Kepes’s Center at M.I.T.,” *Art International*, January 1974, 28–49.

⁵⁶ *Studio International* ran an “Art and Technology” column every month from March 1969 to January 1972.

⁵⁷ For a collection of recent scholarship on E.A.T and the “Nine Evenings,” see Catherine Morris, Jane Farver, Clarisse Bardiot, Michelle Kuo, *9 Evenings Reconsidered* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). For an earlier reflection on E.A.T.’s legacy, see Jasia Reichardt, “E.A.T. and after,” *Studio International*, May 1968, 236–237.

⁵⁸ For a detailed retrospective of the APG’s activities, see John A. Walker, “APG: The Individual and the Organisation – A Decade of Conceptual Engineering,” *Studio International*, March/April 1976, 167–172. For an early, and incisive, reaction to the foundational premises of the APG see, Gustav Metzger, “A Critical Look at Artist Placement Group,” *Studio International*, January 1972.

⁵⁹ Robert Smithson, “Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site,” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 52–60, 52.

⁶⁰ Charles Harrison, “A Very Abstract Context,” *Studio International*, November 1970, 194–98, 198 n.35.

⁶¹ For an account of art history’s disciplinary resistance to coding Conceptual art in terms of the development of information technology, see, Edward Shanken, “Art in the Information Age:

Technology and Conceptual Art," *Leonardo* 35, no.4. (2002): 433–438. For an exception to this general tendency see, Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (Berlin: b_books Verlag, 2007) 101–143.

⁶² Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 9.

⁶³ T.J. Clark has made a similar point in relation to Warhol: "How handmade and petty-bourgeois his bright world of consumer durable now looks! How haunted still by a dream of freedom!" T.J. Clark, "Origins of the Present Crisis," *New Left Review*, Mar-Apr 2000, 85–96, 95.

⁶⁴ Alloway himself missed the radical paradigm shift, seeking to account for Minimalist systemic painting as a *continuation* of the model of subjective agency familiar from Abstract Expressionism: "A system is not antithetical to the values suggested by such art world word-clusters as humanist, organic, and process... Malevich, Kandinsky, and Mondrian, in different ways, universalized their art by theory, but in New York there is little reliance on Platonic or Pythagorean mysteries. A system is as human as a splash of paint, more so when the splash gets routinized." Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," in *Topics in American Art Since 1945* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), 76–89, 84; 89.

⁶⁵ Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 36.

⁶⁶ See, Branden Joseph "The Tower and the Line: Toward a Genealogy of Minimalism," *Grey Room* 27, Spring 2007, 58–81; James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the 1960s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁶⁷ Peter Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art," *Art History* 27, no.4 (September 2004), 651–70, 663.

⁶⁸ Osborne, "Art Beyond Aesthetics," 663.

⁶⁹ Deke Dusinberre, Seth Siegelaub, Daniel Buren and Michael Claura, "Working with Shadows, Working with Words," *Art Monthly*, December 1988/January 1989, 3–6, 4.

⁷⁰ Dusinberre, et al., "Working with Shadows, Working with Words," 6.

⁷¹ I borrow this schema from Raymond Williams' celebrated argument in "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," see *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 40–42.

⁷² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, Summer 1967, 12–23, 12.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For Judd's own objection to his treatment by Fried, see Donald Judd, "Complaints: Part I," in *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005), 197–199.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Their shared concerns had always been differentiated by Morris' interest in gestalt theory. Furthermore, to do justice to Judd, it is worth recalling that he consistently resisted the notion that he, or any other artist, could be assimilated to a "movement" called Minimal Art: "The new three-dimensional work doesn't constitute a movement, school or style. The common aspects are too general and too little common to define a movement. The differences are greater than the similarities. The similarities are selected from the work; they aren't a movement's first principles or delimiting rules." Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 181–189, 181.

⁷⁷ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non Sequiturs," *Artforum*, June 1967, 24–29, 25.

⁷⁸ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum*, October 1966, 20–23, 21.

⁷⁹ Morris' essay "Anti Form" was published after "Notes" part 3 and before "Notes" part 4. The article signalled a change in direction of his artistic practice. See Robert Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum*, April 1968, 33–35.

⁸⁰ Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, Summer 1967, 79–83, 80.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 83.

⁸³ Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3," 26. My emphasis.

⁸⁴ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," *Artforum*, April 1969, 50–54, 54.

⁸⁵ Robert Morris, personal correspondence with Jack Burnham, 31/03/69, Northwestern University Archive.

⁸⁶ On this issue, see Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine*, January 1990, 44–63. Chave's assertion that minimalism was complicit with corporate power has faced numerous substantive objections.

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- ⁸⁷ Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, "Don Judd," *The Fox* 2 (1975): 129–142, 142.
- ⁸⁸ Margaret Sheffield, "Interview with Hans Haacke," *Studio International*, April 1976, 117–123, 123.
- ⁸⁹ Mel Bochner, "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism," *Arts Magazine*, Summer, 1967, 39–43, 40.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Note that these two comments are not included in the original version of the published article but in the revised and expanded version of the text that Bochner later published. See, Mel Bochner "Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism" in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 92–102, 100.
- ⁹⁴ For Bochner, working in series implied making "different versions of a basic theme" whereas "modular works are based on the repetition of a single unit." Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum*, December 1967, 28–33, 28.
- ⁹⁵ Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," 28.
- ⁹⁶ Alexander Alberro, "Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible, 1966–73," *Artforum*, February 1996, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n6_v34/ai_18163699, 11/04/07.
- ⁹⁷ Jeff Wall, "Partially Reflective Mirror Writing" in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* ed. Alexander Alberro, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), x–xvii, xv.
- ⁹⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55, (Winter, 1990), 105–143, 124.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.
- ¹⁰⁰ Brian Wallis, "Dan Graham's History Lessons" in Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965–1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), viii–xvi, x. My emphasis.
- ¹⁰¹ Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art'" in *Rock My Religion*, vii–xvi, xix.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., xx.
- ¹⁰³ Graham's brief experience of running a gallery was also of influence in this regard.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bochner has described his and Smithson's "Domain of the Great Bear" piece in the following way "we started thinking, could there be an artwork that was a reproduction, but where there was no original? What if the work of art took the form of an article in an art magazine? In other words, turn a secondary source into a primary one. These were pretty subversive notions at the time." See "In Conversation: Mel Bochner with Phong Bui," *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 2006, <http://brooklynrail.org/2006/5/art/in-conversation-mel-bochner-with-phong-bui>.
- ¹⁰⁵ Willats did not, for example, undermine craft traditions by deploying industrial production in the manner of Ed Ruscha's anti-art artist's books.
- ¹⁰⁶ Stephen Willats, untitled statement, *Control* 1, July 1965, 1.
- ¹⁰⁷ For an introduction to Ascott's approach, see his early article, Roy Ascott, "The Construction of Change," *Cambridge Opinion* 41 (1964), 37–42. Ascott's writings from the Sixties to the present day have been collected in, Roy Ascott, *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness by Roy Ascott* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Ascott was himself taught by Richard Hamilton on the 'Basic Design Course' at King's College, Durham University. Hamilton's pedagogy drew on both Bauhaus methodology and the Independent Group's technological and cybernetic enthusiasms and clearly influenced Ascott.
- ¹⁰⁸ Stephen Willats, untitled statement, *Control* 2 (1966), unpaginated.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Herbert Marcuse reflected on the "new forms of control" in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 1–18. However, the most influential account of the implications of a control society has been Deleuzian, see Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming" and "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169–176; 177–182. For an account of how Deleuze's "control society" thesis has been received in contemporary art history, see Branden Joseph, "Society of Control," *Texte zur Kunst*, June 2007, 93–95. Joseph does not discuss the Marcusean precedent.
- ¹¹⁰ For evidence of this, see Stephen Willats "Art Work as Social Model," *Studio International*, March/April 1976, 100–106. Peter Osborne has observed, in general reflection on Willats' "communication-based model of art practice," that "it is important to recognize that there was no reflexive irony in this use of a formalized social scientific methodology, no reflection upon its relation to the instrumentality of administrative reason." Peter Osborne, "Elmgreen and Dragset's The Welfare Show: A Historical Perspective," *Verksted* 7 (2006): 19–40, 30.
- ¹¹¹ Mary Kelly, "Introduction," in *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), xxi.

¹¹² Victor Burgin, "Art-Society Systems," *Control* 4, undated (c. 1968), unpaginated. I reproduce Burgin's "Art-Society Systems" in an appendix to this thesis. Burgin goes on to publish an entire book on the work/commentary relation, Victor Burgin, *Work and Commentary* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973). Jeff Wall has observed that Victor Burgin and Dan Graham are the artists who have paid most attention to the "problematic of the commentary," see Jeff Wall, "Partially Reflective Mirror Writing" xii. We might also add Art & Language to Wall's list, with the caveat that their omission by Wall is likely to have been strategic.

¹¹³ Burgin, "Art-Society Systems," unpaginated.

¹¹⁴ Burgin, "Art-Society Systems," unpaginated.

¹¹⁵ Victor Burgin, "Socialist Formalism," in *Studio International*, March-April 1976, 148–54, 148.

¹¹⁶ Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism: American Art 1966-1986*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 1–2.

¹¹⁷ Victor Burgin, "Commentary: Part I" in *Work and Commentary*, unpaginated.

Chapter 3

¹ “In 1963 I built my first weather box. It was a rectangular container, made of clear plastic, in which I sealed some distilled water.” Hans Haacke, “Provisional remarks,” in *For Real: Works 1959-2006* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2007), 257. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Hans Haacke, For Real: Works 1959–2006” shown at the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

² For a convincing account of the ambivalent political valence of participatory artworks in the late 1960s, see Janet Kraynak, “Dependent Participation: Bruce Nauman’s Environments,” *Grey Room*, no. 10 (Winter 2003): 22–45.

³ Hans Haacke, “Statement,” in *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, ed. Donald Karshan (New York: New York Cultural Center, 1970), 32. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects” shown at the New York Cultural Center. “Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects” was the first large-scale exhibition to use the term “conceptual art.”

⁴ My thinking on art as a problem complex was stimulated by the *Projekt ‘74* exhibition catalogue wherein the curators described their inventive curatorial approach as follows: “By means of the ‘project method’ the exhibition deals from various angles with individual problem areas or so called ‘project groups’ whereby the various aspects of such a problem area clarify one another.” *Projekt ‘74. Kunst bleibt Kunst: Aspekte internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre*. (Köln: Kunsthalle Köln, 1974), 9. . Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Projekt ‘74. Kunst bleibt Kunst: Aspekte internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre” shown at the Kunsthalle Köln.

⁵ For a more detailed reading of pop’s ambivalently affirmative character, see John Roberts “Warhol’s ‘Factory’: Painting and the Mass-Cultural Spectator” in Paul Wood, ed., *Varieties of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 339–361.

⁶ Hans Haacke, “The Agent,” in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Jon Bird, Walter Grasskamp and Molly Nesbit (London: Phaidon, 2004), 107.

⁷ Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder” in *Essays on Conceptual Art*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 29–62, 47.

⁸ Harrison, “Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder,” 44.

⁹ Charles Harrison, “The Late Sixties in London and Elsewhere,” in *1965–1972: When Attitudes Became Form*, ed. Hilary Gresty, (Cambridge: Kettle’s Yard, 1984), 9–16, 13. My emphasis. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “1965–1972: When Attitudes Became Form” shown at Kettle’s Yard Gallery, Cambridge.

¹⁰ Harrison, “Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder,” 44–45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47. As with all caricatures, there is however some truth to it.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29. One might wish to disagree with the “ease” with which Harrison dates conceptual art however.

¹³ Peter Osborne, “Survey,” in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Osborne, (London: Phaidon Press, 2002), 24.

¹⁴ On commodity aesthetics, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*, trans. Robert Bock (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

¹⁵ Charles Harrison, “A Kind of Context” in *Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 1–28, 17.

¹⁶ Tech art, at the time of the early 1960s conceived itself, at least in part, as the direct heir of constructivism in this sense. See Terry Fenton, “Constructivism and Its Confusions,” *Artforum*, January 1969, 22–27.

¹⁷ Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991), 15.

¹⁸ Frederic Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text*, no.9/10 (Spring–Summer, 1984), 178–209, 207. For Mandel’s account of the third technological revolution, see Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres, (London: New Left Books, 1975), 184–222.

¹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 236.

²⁰ Michael Corris, “Recoding Information, Knowledge, and Technology,” in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. Michael Corris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187–199, 189.

²¹ Conversely philosophy, in full anti-Hegelian, anti-systematic mode forms a clear exception at this point. Though, for a slightly later, idiosyncratic attempt to develop Bertalanffy’s systems theory into a systems philosophy (inspired by Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy),

see Ervin Laszlo, *Introduction to Systems Philosophy: Toward a New Paradigm of Contemporary Thought* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1972).

²² Corris, "Recoding Information, Knowledge, and Technology," 189.

²³ Peter Osborne, "Uses of Reification Or, Social Illusions and the Illusions of Art" Paper to the Symposium, "Systems Art," Whitechapel Gallery, London, 27 October 2007, unpublished.

²⁴ Frederic Jameson, "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 42. Jameson has used this metaphor at an earlier date, describing the Modernist literary trope of repetition as a mimicking of the new product development cycle, a "homeopathic strategy whereby the scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over, 'acted out' and symbolically neutralised." Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, no.1 (Winter, 1979): 130–148, 136.

²⁵ Michael Corris, "Systems Upgrade," <http://www.metamute.org/en/Systems-Upgrade-Conceptual-Art-and-the-Recoding-of-Information-Knowledge-and-Technology>.

²⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 12; 13.

²⁷ Technocracy is concisely and persuasively characterised by Theodore Roszak as "that social form in which an industrial society reaches the peak of its organizational integration."

Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5.

²⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55, (Winter, 1990): 105–143, 143

²⁹ Herbert Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in Max Weber," *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (London: Allen Lane, 1968), 201–226, 217.

³⁰ Claus Offe, "Technology and One-Dimensionality: A Version of the Technocracy Thesis?" in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, ed. Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg and Charles P. Webel (London: Macmillan, 1988), 215–224, 216.

³¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xvi. My emphasis.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity," in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, 3–12, 3.

³⁵ Herbert Marcuse, "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," *Arts Magazine* 41, May 1967. Reprinted in Herbert Marcuse, *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Vol. 4*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2006), 113–122, 113–114. "Art in the One-Dimensional Society" was first presented as a lecture at the New York School of Visual Arts, March 8, 1967.

³⁶ Marcuse, "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," 118.

³⁷ David Harvey elaborates on the relationship between the counter cultures and new Left politics: "Antagonistic to the oppressive qualities of scientifically grounded technical-bureaucratic rationality as purveyed through monolithic corporate, state, and other forms of institutionalized power (including that of bureaucratized political parties and trade unions), the counter-cultures explored the realms of individualized self-realization through a distinctive 'new left' politics..." David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 38.

³⁸ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 91; 21–22.

³⁹ Wall's position has become less favourable towards conceptual art and its ongoing possibility in the years since he wrote *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*. For an indicative summary of his current position see, "Post-60s Photography and its Modernist Context: A Conversation Between Jeff Wall and John Roberts," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, vol.1 (2007): 153–167.

⁴⁰ Thus, on Wall's account, the "appropriation of mechanical and commercial techniques" might again be assayed for the purpose of socializing technique (particularly as these productive forces develop, producing new historical contradictions in the process).

⁴¹ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 9.

⁴² Herbert Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," in *On the Future of Art*, ed. Edward Fry (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 123–134, 130.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 97.

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- ⁴⁶ Gregory Battock, "Art in the Service of the Left," in *Idea Art*, ed. Gregory Battock (New York: Dutton, 1973), 18–29, 21.
- ⁴⁷ Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 369.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 376.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 6; 8.
- ⁵⁰ I am indebted to Osborne's "Uses of Reification" for its clarification of the historical development of the concept.
- ⁵¹ Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 300–318, 315.
- ⁵² "If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. The social totality appears in this aporia, swallowing whole whatever occurs." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 237.
- ⁵³ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 212.
- ⁵⁴ Jack Burnham "Systems Esthetics," in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 15–25; Jack Burnham, "Systems and Art," in *Arts in Society* 4, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1969): 195–203; Jack Burnham, *Art in the Marcusean Analysis* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969), Jack Burnham, "Real Time Systems," in *Great Western Salt Works*, 27–38; Jack Burnham, "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems" in *On the Future of Art*, ed. Edward F. Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 95–122; Jack Burnham, "Notes on Art and Information Processing," in *Software - Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art*, ed. Jack Burnham, (New York: Jewish Museum, 1970), 10–14.
- ⁵⁵ It was subsequently published as the sixth volume in the Penn State Papers in Art Educations series.
- ⁵⁶ Burnham's analysis also broaches Marcuse's earlier works *Eros and Civilisation: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud* (1955) and *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (1961).
- ⁵⁷ Michael Corris represents the only exception whom I am aware of to this general oversight, see Corris, *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, Practice*, 195; 271. My own earlier work is also guilty of this oversight see Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Burnham's Systems Aesthetics," *Tate Papers*, no.5, Spring 2006, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06spring/skrebowski.htm>.
- ⁵⁸ Burnham does reference Marcuse in his article "Real Time Systems," but the reference is to *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and does not touch on his more significant debt to *One-Dimensional Man*.
- ⁵⁹ Burnham, *Art in the Marcusean Analysis*, 3.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 7–8.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 9.
- ⁶² Ibid., 8–9.
- ⁶³ Marcuse, "Art as a Form of Reality," 133.
- ⁶⁴ Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, 98.
- ⁶⁵ Burnham, "Systems and Art," 195.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 196.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 197.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 197.
- ⁷¹ Burnham, "Systems Aesthetics," 24.
- ⁷² Ibid., 15.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 17.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 15; 16.
- ⁷⁵ Jack Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art" in Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed: 7 Works 1970-75*, 127-41 (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 128.
- ⁷⁶ Haacke has stated that he helped to edit Burnham's text, Hans Haacke, in discussion with the author, September 2005, New York.
- ⁷⁷ Jeanne Siegel, "An Interview with Hans Haacke," *Arts Magazine*, May 1971, 18–21, 18.
- ⁷⁸ Hans Haacke, "Untitled statement" (1967), in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Jon Bird, Walter Grasskamp, and Molly Nesbit, (London: Phaidon Press, 2004), 102.

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- ⁷⁹ Burnham, "Systems Aesthetics," 24.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 16; 17.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., 16.
- ⁸² On the issue of Burnham's relation to constructivism, see Jack Burnham and Terry Fenton, "An Exchange," *Artforum* April 1969, 60–61.
- ⁸³ Burnham, "Real Time Systems," 27.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 37.
- ⁸⁵ Burnham, "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems," 120–121.
- ⁸⁶ Burnham, "Notes on Art and Information Processing," 10.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.
- ⁸⁸ Patricia Norvell, "Interview with Robert Morris, May 16 1969," in *Recording Conceptual Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 56–69, 65.
- ⁸⁹ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), xxi.
- ⁹⁰ Burnham, "The Aesthetics of Intelligent Systems," 97.
- ⁹¹ "Interview with Sol LeWitt, June 12 1969," in *Recording Conceptual Art*, 120.
- ⁹² "Interview with Robert Smithson, June 20, 1969," *ibid.*, 133.
- ⁹³ Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," *Artforum*, June 1966, 26–31. Entropy, following the Second Law of Thermodynamics, is a thermodynamic quantity that represents the amount of energy present in a system that cannot be converted into work.
- ⁹⁴ Burnham was far from unique here, Douglas Huebler has commented on the problem of Kosuth's conception of conceptual art becoming generalised as conceptual art "proper:" "In 1969 Joseph Kosuth implied the definition of conceptual art's correct practice and practitioners in 'Art after Philosophy I and II,' published in *Studio International* magazine. That early definition was immediately historicized as 'art as idea' by many readers and thereafter was used to measure the purity of other conceptual activities whose character and purpose was programmatically different." Seth Siegelaub, Marion Fricke and Rosawitha Fricke, eds., *The Context of Art/The Art of Context* (Trieste: Navado Press, 2004), 135.
- ⁹⁵ Jack Burnham, "Problems of Criticism, IX," *Artforum*, January 1971, 40–45, 43.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid., 41. For a fuller statement of this position, see Jack Burnham, "Art and Technology: The Panacea that Failed," in *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Madison: Coda Press, 1980), 200–218.
- ⁹⁷ Jack Burnham, *The Structure of Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).
- ⁹⁸ Adrian Piper, "The Logic of Modernism" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 546–49, 548. My emphasis.
- ⁹⁹ Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art" *Art-Language* 1, no.1, 1969, xx.
- ¹⁰⁰ Adrian Piper, "My Art Education" (1968) in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume 1: Selected Writing in Meta-Art 1968-1992*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996, 4 n.3.
- ¹⁰¹ Adrian Piper, "My Art Education" (1968) in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Volume 1: Selected Writing in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 5. My emphasis.
- ¹⁰² See "Issue 6" in Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, eds., *0 To 9, The Complete Magazine: 1969-1969* (New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2006), 79–81.
- ¹⁰³ Adrian Piper, "Three Models of Art Production Systems," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Vol II Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967-1992* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 13.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵ Piper's subsequent work, beginning with the Catalysis (1970) series, is renowned for turn to identity politics, addressing the situated character of the subject of art production in terms of gender, race and class.
- ¹⁰⁶ Adrian Piper, "A Defense of the 'Conceptual' Process in Art," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight: Vol II*, 3–4, 3. My emphasis.
- ¹⁰⁷ Victor Burgin, "Situational Aesthetics," *Studio International*, October 1969, 118–121, 119.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹¹ Peter Osborne, "Everywhere, or not at all: Victor Burgin and Conceptual art," in *Relocating Victor Burgin* (Bristol: Arnolfini, 2002), 66. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition "Relocating Victor Burgin" shown at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol.
- ¹¹² Osborne, "Everywhere, or not at all," 65–66.

¹¹³ Victor Burgin, "Thanks for the Memory," *Architectural Design*, August 1970, 288-292.

¹¹⁴ Siegel, "An Interview with Hans Haacke," 21.

¹¹⁵ "Untitled Statement," in *When Attitudes Become Form*, ed. Harald Szeeman (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969). Catalogue presented in conjunction with the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" shown at Kunsthalle, Bern.

¹¹⁶ Mierle Lademan Ukeles, "Maintenance Art Manifesto: Proposal for an Exhibition, 'CARE'," in *Conceptual Art*, 245-246.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of Robert Barry and Douglas Huebler's work in this genre, see Peter Osborne, "Starting Up All Over Again: Time and Existence in Some Conceptual Art of the 1960s," in *The Quick and the Dead*, ed. Peter Eleey (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2009), 91-106. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition "The Quick and the Dead" shown at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

¹¹⁸ Charles Harrison, "The Late Sixties in London and Elsewhere," 9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Harrison, "Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder," 30.

¹²¹ Hans Haacke, untitled statement, *Art International*, April 1968, 55.

Chapter 4

¹ Mary Kelly, "Interview: Douglas Crimp in Conversation with Mary Kelly," in *Mary Kelly*, ed. Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp and Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 8–30, 15.

² "The commitment signalled by the *Index* was that the purposive activity of Art & Language would be identified with the analysis of its own idiom, its language or languages, on the evidence provided by the accumulation of written material." Charles Harrison, "Indexes and Other Figures," in *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 63–81, 64.

³ Kelly, "Interview," 15. My emphasis.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Judith Mastai, ed., *Social Process/Collaborative Action: Mary Kelly 1970–75*, (Vancouver: Charles H. Scott Gallery, 1997), 22. An exhibition catalogue.

⁶ Ultimately *Index 01* would conclude, rather acrimoniously, a certain period of Art & Language's production and result in the breakup of a particular incarnation of the group. For an account of this, see, Terry Atkinson, *The Indexing, The World War I Moves and the Ruins of Conceptualism* (Dublin: Circa Publications, 1992).

⁷ Mary Kelly, "Preface," in *Post-Partum Document* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xix.

⁸ Peter Wollen, "Thirteen Paragraphs," in *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 30.

⁹ In so doing, *Women and Work*, along with *Post-Partum Document*, challenge Jeff Wall's sweeping assertion that in conceptual art "social subjects" were "presented as enigmatic hieroglyphs and given the authority of the crypt." Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1991), 19.

¹⁰ Kelly, "Interview," 9–10.

¹¹ Rosalind Delmar, "Women and Work Exhibition Review," in *Social Process/Collaborative Action*, 91.

¹² Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 5.

¹³ Charles Harrison, "The Late Sixties in London and Elsewhere," in *1965–1972: When Attitudes Became Form*, ed. Hilary Gresty, (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 1984), 9–16, 12–13. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "1965–1972: When Attitudes Became Form" shown at Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge.

¹⁴ Jack Burnham, "Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art," in Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed: 7 Works 1970–75* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 127–141, 132–133.

¹⁵ This was also a challenge addressed by Mary Kelly in the description for her Camberwell School of Art course entitled "The New Art": "By focusing attention on work produced in Europe and America since 1965, this seminar aims to analyze what has been called the 'dematerialization' of the art object. It designates areas such as conceptual, narrative, information, idea, anti-form, systems, process, performance and body art in relation to an examination of the social and political upheaval of the late sixties." Kelly also stipulates that readings for the course included Lucy Lippard and Jack Burnham. Mary Kelly, "The New Art" (1976), in *Rereading Post-partum Document: Mary Kelly*, ed. Sabine Breitwieser, (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999), 229 n.13. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Rereading Post-Partum Document" shown at the Generali Foundation, Vienna.

¹⁶ Lizzie Borden, "Three Modes of Conceptual Art" *Artforum*, June 1972, 68–71.

¹⁷ Borden's definition of conceptual art ran as follows: "The category 'Conceptual art' is an imprecise term for the multitude of works which claim to elevate concept over material realization."

¹⁸ Joseph Kosuth, "1975," *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966–1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 129–143, 130ff. First published in *The Fox*, no. 2 (1975): 87–96.

¹⁹ Even though the word "form" also carries the secondary sense "the way in which something is done or made" it is the primary sense which is most active, especially when used in the context of a description of art works. All definitions *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th edition.

²⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, no. 55 (Winter, 1990): 105–143, 107.

²¹ Sol LeWitt "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): 11–13, 12.

²² With the (qualified) exception of Kosuth – presumably excluded by Buchloh anyway given his specification of "English" Art & Language.

²³ Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art" in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 317–326, 325.

²⁴ Art & Language, "Introduction," *Art-Language* 1, no.1, 1–10, 1.

²⁵ Joseph Kosuth, "Within the Context: Modernism and Critical Practice," in *Art After Philosophy and After*, 153–167, 162.

²⁶ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969," 107. We also extend Osborne's strong/exclusive, weak/inclusive binary characterisation of conceptual art, see Peter Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," 49.

²⁷ See Michael Corris, "Inside a New York Art Gang; Selected Documents of Art & Language, New York," *Conceptual Art a Critical Anthology*, 470–485; Alexander Alberro, "One Year Under the Mast," *Artforum*, June 2003.

²⁸ Joseph Kosuth, "Introductory Note by the American Editor," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 1–4.

²⁹ Ibid., 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 2.

³¹ Ibid. My emphasis.

³² Ibid., 3.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Osborne, "Conceptual art and/as Philosophy," 59.

³⁵ Ibid., 62.

³⁶ Harrison, "Conceptual Art," 320.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 319.

⁴⁰ Charles Harrison, "Art & Language Press," *Studio International*, June 1972, 234.

⁴¹ On the significance of the St Martin's context for British Conceptual art, see William Wood "A Fish Ceases to be a Fish: A Critical History of English Conceptual Art 1966–72" (PhD diss., Sussex University, 1998).

⁴² For a rather tortured attempt to read "Crane" in terms of artistic intentionality rather than institutional contextualisation see, Joseph Kosuth, "Notes on Crane" (1970), in *Art After Philosophy and After*, 77–78.

⁴³ Art & Language, "Introduction," 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Harrison, "Art & Language Press," 234.

⁴⁶ Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art and the Suppression of the Beholder," *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 59.

⁴⁷ Harrison had acted as the curator of the ICA version of Szeeman's exhibition when it travelled to London but had only been able to make limited additions to the show by including UK-based artists within it.

⁴⁸ Art & Language, "We Aimed to Be Amateurs," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 442–448, 445.

⁴⁹ Mary Anne Staniszewski, "Mel Ramsden Interview," *Flash Art* (Conceptual Art Supplement), November/December 1988, 137.

⁵⁰ Terry Atkinson, "From an Art & Language Point of View," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 25–71, 25.

⁵¹ Ibid.,

⁵² Ibid., 50.

⁵³ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52. It should be noted that Atkinson strongly caveats his claims at the end of his own article, stating that the analogy is entirely his own and that "no philosopher either by written or spoken word has ever suggested to me that there is any strong connection between Conceptual Art and Existentialism nor between Analytic Art and British Analytic Philosophy." Ibid., 53.

⁵⁷ For a refutation of Kosuth's philosophical claims see, Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," *passim*.

⁵⁸ Osborne, "Conceptual art and/as Philosophy," 63. My emphasis.

⁵⁹ Atkinson described the projects as follows: "Bainbridge/Hurrell question the assumption, be it implicit or explicit, that kinetic art is an accurate assessment of the limits of the possibilities of

engineering technology (in art?). In its broadest sense they see art as a means of inquiry into the basic assumptions and concepts governing and forming the practice of art, the possibilities of practise in this field through deploying engineering methods hardly seems to have been considered." Terry Atkinson, "Concerning Interpretation of the Bainbridge/Hurrell Models," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 68-69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 69.

⁶¹ Harold Hurrell, "Notes on Atkinson's 'Concerning Interpretation of the Bainbridge/Hurrell Models,'" *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 73.

⁶² Ibid., 72. Hurrell acknowledges that the sensibility of most cybernetic and kinetic artists remains conventional.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Harold Hurrell, "Sculptures and Devices," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): 75. My emphasis.

⁶⁷ Atkinson, "Concerning Interpretation of the Bainbridge/Hurrell Models," 68.

⁶⁸ Harrison, "Art & Language Press," 234.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. For an account of Kuhn's influence within the artworld, see Caroline Jones, "The Modernist Paradigm: The Artworld and Thomas Kuhn," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 488-528.

⁷² Charles Harrison, "Feeling the Earth Move," in *Since 1950: Art and its Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 127-146, 137-138.

⁷³ On this issue, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁷⁴ Charles Harrison, "Review: Projekt '74," *Studio International*, September 1974.

⁷⁵ Mel Ramsden, "Framing and Being Framed—Or, Are We Going to Let Barbara Rose Get Away with 'Dialectics' this Year," *The Fox*, no. 3 (1976), 64-68, 65.

⁷⁶ Michael Corris, "Inside a New York Art Gang: Selected Documents of Art & Language, New York," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 470-485, 474.

⁷⁷ Joseph Kosuth, "Teaching to Learn," in *Art After Philosophy and After*, 253-256, 254-255.

⁷⁸ Alexander Alberro situates the cancellation of Haacke's show against the backdrop of a swing towards cultural conservatism in the Guggenheim's exhibition policy at that time, spurred by the hostile response to the Sixth Guggenheim International. Alexander Alberro, "The Turn of the Screw: Daniel Buren, Dan Flavin, and the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition," *October*, no. 80 (Spring 1997): 57-84.

⁷⁹ Kosuth, "Within the Context," 154.

⁸⁰ Joseph Kosuth, "Work," *The Fox*, no. 3, (1976): 116-120, 120.

⁸¹ "Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey in Conversation," Mary Kelly, *Imaging Desire* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 33-34.

⁸² For Kosuth: "A.J. Ayer's evaluation of Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic is useful to use here: 'A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience.'" Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," *Art After Philosophy and After*, 13-36, 20.

⁸³ For an account of Kosuth's philosophical limitations, see Peter Osborne "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art* ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) 47-65,

⁸⁴ Mary Kelly, "Introduction: Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in *Imaging Desire*, xx.

⁸⁵ Ibid., xvii-xix.

⁸⁶ See Mary Kelly, "Art and Sexual Politics," in *Framing Feminism*, ed. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, (London: Pandora, 1987), 303-312.

⁸⁷ Lucy Lippard organised the exhibition "c.7500" (1973) specifically to address the lack of institutional visibility for female (Conceptual) artists.

⁸⁸ Kelly, "Introduction," xx-xxi.

⁸⁹ Adrian Piper, "The Logic of Modernism," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 548.

⁹⁰ Dan Graham, untitled statement, in *Rereading Post-partum Document*, 151.

⁹¹ Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, xvi.

⁹² For a more detailed discussion of this work in relation to Haacke's practice, see Luke Skrebowski, "All Systems Go: Recovering Hans Haacke's Systems Art," *Grey Room*, no.30 (Winter 2008), 54–83. My argument here is indebted to my earlier article.

⁹³ Jon Bird recounts an actual occurrence of just such a disruption of gallery etiquette—Robert Morris's 1971 retrospective at the Tate. The show had to be closed down temporarily and re-installed after visitors damaged many of the exhibits through over-enthusiastic participation, see Jon Bird, "Minding the Body: Robert Morris's 1971 Tate Gallery Retrospective," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Jon Bird and Michael Newman, (London: Reaktion, 1999), 88–106.

⁹⁴ Hans Haacke, "The Agent," in *Hans Haacke*, ed. Jon Bird, Walter Grasskamp and Molly Nesbit (London: Phaidon, 2004), 106.

⁹⁵ Thierry de Duve, in a notably reactionary article, has summarised the development of art after conceptual art as the triumph of "attitude" over creativity: "Everybody here, I'm sure, is familiar with what happened next. Linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, structuralism and post-structuralism, in short, 'theory' (or so-called 'French theory') entered art schools and succeeded in displacing – sometimes replacing – studio practice..." Thierry de Duve, "When Form Has Become Attitude – And Beyond," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 19–31, 27.

⁹⁶ "How Can you Defend Making Paintings Now? A Conversation between Mel Bochner and James Meyer" in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, ed. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon and Stephen Melville (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 199–215, 199–200.

⁹⁷ Mel Bochner, "Three Statements for *Data Magazine*" (1972), in *Solar System & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 96–101, 100.

⁹⁸ "How Can you Defend Making Paintings Now? A Conversation between Mel Bochner and James Meyer" in Armstrong et al, ed. *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, 203.

⁹⁹ The materiality of the signifier was of course never denied by the proponents of analytic conceptual art, as Atkinson's response to Lippard and Chandler's "dematerialisation" claims amply attests.

¹⁰⁰ "How Can you Defend Making Paintings Now?," 202.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰² Victor Burgin, "In Reply," *Art-Language* 2, no.2 (Summer 1972): 32–34, 32.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Art & Language, "Semiotique Hardcore," *Art-Language* 3, no.4 (October 1976), 35–36, 35. This issue of *Art-Language* was provocatively entitled *Fox 4*, representing ALUK's *rappel à l'ordre* after the collapse of the breakaway ALNY faction following publication of the third and final issue of *The Fox*.

¹⁰⁵ "If we imagine, by way of analogy, an electronic circuit into which a component (X) is plugged – we can change the state of that system by a lengthy process of rewiring or we can simply replace the component by (Y) which has a different value... If we expand the analogy and consider our circuit as functioning within a complex of discrete but mutually affective circuits, then we have a picture of the cultural object 'art' amongst other cultural objects within the overall structure of culture-as-a-whole at any given time and place." Victor Burgin, "Rules of Thumb," *Studio International*, May 1971, 237–239, 238.

¹⁰⁶ See Hans Haacke and Pierre Bourdieu, *Free Exchange* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Hans Haacke, personal correspondence with the author, June 12, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," 12.

Chapter 5

- ¹ “An Interview with Carsten Höller,” *The Unilever Series: Carsten Höller* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), unpaginated. Pamphlet published in conjunction with the exhibition “The Unilever Series: Carsten Höller, Test Site” shown at the Tate Modern, London, 10 October 2006 to 9 April 2007.
- ² “We conceived the Turbine Hall installation as a large-scale experiment to see how slides can be used in public spaces, how they’re received, and what they do to users and to viewers. It’s a ‘test site’ in the sense of a study using volunteers in a museum space.” “An Interview with Carsten Höller,” *The Unilever Series: Carsten Höller*, unpaginated.
- ³ *Carsten Höller: Test Site*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 87–115. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “The Unilever Series: Carsten Höller, Test Site” shown at the Tate Modern.
- ⁴ General Public Agency, “Slides in the Public Realm: A Feasibility Study for London,” *Carsten Höller: Test Site*, 55–85.
- ⁵ Carsten Höller, “A Thousand Words,” *Artforum*, March 1999, 103.
- ⁶ Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 123–135, 133. Revised version of an article originally published in *Artforum*, September, 2005.
- ⁷ Liam Gillick, “Context Kunstlers,” *Art Monthly*, June 1994, 12.
- ⁸ Andrea Fraser, “In and Out of Place,” *Art in America*, June 1985. Fraser’s article was one of the first substantive pieces published on Lawler’s work. Fraser describes the genesis of the article: “I was a student at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, sitting in on Craig Owen’s art criticism class at the School of the Visual Arts. I had met Louise through Allan McCollum, who I met through Thomas Lawson, who also taught at SVA, and I proposed to Craig that I write something about Louise for his class. He said, well, why don’t you develop something serious and I’ll try to get it into *Art in America*. He was an editor there at the time. He was a big fan of Louise’s work. Very little had been written about her at that time. I was nineteen.” George Baker and Andrea Fraser, “Displacement and Condensation: A Conversation on the Work of Louise Lawler,” *Louise Lawler and Others*, (Basel: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 109. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “Louise Lawler and Others” shown at Kunstmuseum Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst.
- ⁹ The article announces many of the themes that will structure Fraser’s career, as she has acknowledged in interview: “you have to understand that Louise’s work and the view of it I developed in that essay inaugurated my won work as an artist.” Fraser, “Displacement and Condensation,” 110.
- ¹⁰ This list is not exhaustive, nor does it reflect the disputes that have occurred over whether this or that artist belongs to the “second” or “third” generation of practitioners. I argue that such disputes are not productive, as is discussed below.
- ¹¹ Blake Stimson, “The Promise of Conceptual Art” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, xxxviii–lii, xlvii (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- ¹² “The original conceptual art is a failed avant-garde. Historians will not be surprised to find, amongst the ruins of its utopian program, the desire to resist commodification and assimilation to a history of styles. The “new” conceptual art is the mirror image of the old—nothing but commodity, nothing but style.” Victor Burgin, “Yes, difference again: what history plays the first time around as tragedy, it repeats as farce,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 428–430, 430.
- ¹³ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October*, no. 55 (Winter 1990): 142–143.
- ¹⁴ Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions,” 126.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126–127.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ¹⁸ Sarah Charlesworth, “A Declaration of Dependence,” *The Fox*, no. 1 (1975): 1–7, 1.
- ¹⁹ “The term ‘institutional critique,’ used to describe the politicized art practice of the late 1960s and early 1970s, first appeared in print in Mel Ramsden’s “On Practice” (1975).” Alexander Alberro, “Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique,” in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artist’s Writings*, 2–19, 8 (Cambridge: MIT Press, forthcoming). Publisher’s proof.

- ²⁰ Mel Ramsden, "Framing and Being Framed—Or, Are We Going to Let Barbara Rose Get Away with 'Dialectics' this Year," *The Fox*, no. 3 (1976): 65.
- ²¹ Mel Ramsden, "Perimeters of Protest," *The Fox*, no. 1 (1975): 134.
- ²² Charlesworth, "A Declaration of Dependence," 1.
- ²³ Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions" 128–129.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 129. My emphasis.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Hans Haacke, personal correspondence with the author, June 12, 2007.
- ²⁷ Deke Dusinberre, Seth Siegelau, Daniel Buren, and Michael Claura, "Working with Shadows, Working with Words," *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 432–441, 433.
- ²⁸ Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on Works 1969–1979* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 209. Asher's "situational aesthetics," in contrast to Burgin's equates the artistic situation with the institution. For a critical account of the way in which Asher's situational aesthetics has tended to become aestheticised over time, giving up its critical character, see, Claude Gintz, "Michael Asher and the Transformation of 'Situational Aesthetics'," *October* 66 (Fall 1993): 113–131.
- ²⁹ Andrea Fraser, "What's Intangible, Transitory, Mediating, Participatory and Rendered in the Public Sphere? Part II," in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 77–78. My emphases.
- ³⁰ A reified institutional critique also risks re-aestheticisation. This situation has been exemplified by none other than Benjamin Buchloh's in his recent revisionist assessment of Asher and Haacke's work as "conceptual sculptural practices." Buchloh's antithetical formulation indicates that he has adjusted his own critical stance in the face of the return of the "displaced painterly and sculptural paradigms of the past" which he formerly condemned as a reactionary consequence of the "failure" of conceptual art. Benjamin Buchloh, "Hans Haacke: From Factographic Sculpture to Counter-Monument," in Hans Haacke, *For Real: Works 1959–2006*, ed. Matthias Flügge and Robert Fleck (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2007), 42–59, 54. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition "For Real: Works 1959–2006" shown at the Deichtorhallen Hamburg and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
- ³¹ Michael Newman, "Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An Unfinished Project?," in *Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Osborne, 288–289, 289 (London: Phaidon Press, 2002).
- ³² Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions," 124. My emphasis.
- ³³ Ibid., 134. My emphasis.
- ³⁴ Andrea Fraser, "What is Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique and After*, 305–309, 307. My emphasis.
- ³⁵ Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions," 131.
- ³⁶ For a critical discussion of Fraser's work see, Sabeth Buchmann, "Es Kann Nicht Jede/r Andrea Heissen," *Texte zur Kunst* (December 2003): 99–109.
- ³⁷ Isabelle Graw, "Beyond Institutional Critique," *Institutional Critique and After*, 137–51, 139.
- ³⁸ Ian Burn, "The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation," *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 320–333, 320–331. First published in *Artforum*, April 1975, 34–37.
- ³⁹ Burn, "The Art Market," 325.
- ⁴⁰ Weibel even included Meyer's own catalogue essay from "What Happened to the Institutional Critique" within the catalogue for "Kontext Kunst." For a comparative discussion of Meyer and Weibel's exhibitions see, Christian Kravagna, "Kontext Kunst," *Kunstforum International* 125 (1994): 292–294.
- ⁴¹ For an account of the development of context art see, Stefan Germer, "Unter Geiern Kontext-Kunst im Kontext," *Texte zur Kunst*, August 1995, 83–95.
- ⁴² Peter Weibel, "Zur sozialen Konstruktion von Kunst," in *Kontext Kunst: Kunst der 90er Jahre* (Köln: DuMont, 1994), 1–68.
- ⁴³ Isabelle Graw, "Beyond Institutional Critique," 147.
- ⁴⁴ Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed: 7 Works 1970–75* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions," 127–129.
- ⁴⁵ Ramsden, "On Practice," 68.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Charlesworth, "A Declaration of Dependence," 1.
- ⁴⁸ Juliane Rebentisch, "Autonomy and Context," in *Contextualise* (Köln: DuMont, 2003), 181–185, 182. My emphasis. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition "Contextualise" shown at the Kunstverein in Hamburg.

⁴⁹ Andrea Fraser, "How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction," in *Museum Highlights*, 153–161, 154.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁵¹ Isabelle Graw has criticised kontext kunst as a "fatally abbreviating label." Isabelle Graw, "That Was Years Ago: A Call for Politicization," in *Contextualise*, 12–16, 13.

⁵² Walead Beshty, "Neo-Avantgarde and Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics," *Texte zur Kunst* 59 (September 2005), <http://www.textezurkunst.de/NR59/NEO-AVANTGARDE-AND-SERVICE-INDUSTRY.html>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ I concur with this analysis, having been struck by the eerie "staginess" of the social interactions stimulated by Tiravanija's Serpentine show in 2005.

⁵⁵ Liam Gillick, "Preface: How are we Gong to Behave?," in *Proxemics: Selected Writings (1988–2006)* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 9–12, 9.

⁵⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du Réel, 1998); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du Réel, 2002); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman, (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002); Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, trans. James Gussen and Lili Porten (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009). Bourriaud has also published a novel, *L'ère tertiaire*, which treats in fictional form many of the concerns that emerge in his critical work, specifically the cultural impact of a services-led economy. The novel remains untranslated. Nicolas Bourriaud, *L'ère tertiaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

⁵⁷ Bennett Simpson, "Public Relations: Nicolas Bourriaud Interview," *Artforum*, April 2001, 47.

⁵⁸ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 7–8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁰ Jacques Rancière, "Problems in Critical Art" in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), 83–93; Hal Foster, "Arty Party," *London Review of Books*, December 2003, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n23/fost01_.html; Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, *October*, no. 110 (Fall 2004): 51–79; Eric Alliez "Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus. Of Relational Aesthetics," in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, ed. Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), forthcoming; Stewart Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," *Verksted*, no. 8 (2006): 97–129. Bishop's article in particular has gone on to provoke significant debate, see, Liam Gillick, "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'," *October* no. 115 (Winter 2006): 95–107, and Bishop's response in the same issue.

⁶¹ Rancière, "Problems in Critical Art," 92.

⁶² Foster, *Arty Party*, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n23/fost01_.html.

⁶³ Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁵ Alliez, "Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus," forthcoming.

⁶⁶ Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," 109.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁸ Alliez notes the inadequacy of Bourriaud's claim to have broken with the critical art of the sixties but does not make this inight his focus.

⁶⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 44. My emphasis.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7. Translation amended.

⁷¹ Fraser, "From The Critique of Institutions," 133.

⁷² Foster, *Arty Party*, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n23/fost01_.html.

⁷³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 113.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 67–68.

⁷⁵ Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," in *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 15–25, 16.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁷ It is not anthologized, for example, in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900–2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

⁷⁸ Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," 24.

⁷⁹ Indeed, spurred in no small part by Bourriaud's visibility, Foster is also attempting to mark out his own response to "twenty-first century issues" by adapting Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash's theory of "reflexive modernity," testing out his conjectures in his

architecture criticism: “For Beck, modernity is now in a ‘second’ stage because it has become reflexive, concerned to modernise its own bases. This notion, too, is suggestive vis-à-vis Piano: like other major architects, he is commissioned to convert old industrial structures (his Paganini auditorium was once a sugar factory), sometimes entire sites (such as the Genoa harbour), in ways that are fitting for a postindustrial economy.” Hal Foster, “Global Style,” *London Review of Books*, 20 September 2007, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n18/fost01_.html. It is revealing that Foster has sought to deploy this concept in his architecture criticism, his own ‘minor’ field and the one in which postmodernism arguably first took hold. Scott Lash, identifying the concept as “a creative departure from the seemingly endless debates between modernists and postmodernists” has characterised reflexive modernisation as follows: “It points... to the possibility of a positive new twist to the Enlightenment’s dialectic. What happens, analysts like Beck and Giddens ask, when modernity begins to reflect on itself? What happens when modernization, understanding its own excesses and vicious spiral of destructive subjugation (of inner, outer and social nature) begins to take itself as an object of reflection? This new self-reflexivity of modernity would... be a development immanent to the modernisation process itself. It would be a condition of, at a certain historical point, the development of functional prerequisites for further modernization.” Scott Lash, “Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community,” in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, 110–173, 112–13. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

⁸⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud, “Later modernism,” in *The Showroom Annual 2004-5: New Moderns?* (London: The Showroom Gallery, 2005), 42–46, 43. Catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition “New Moderns?” shown at the Showroom Gallery in London.

⁸¹ Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, 19.

⁸² Peter Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art,” *Art History* 27, no.4 (September 2004): 651–670, 663.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 663.

⁸⁴ Peter Osborne, “Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts,” *New Formations*, no. 9 (Winter 1989): 31–50, 32–33.

⁸⁵ On the passage of the idea of modern art from Europe to America see, Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁸⁶ Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics,” 663. Osborne’s argument is persuasive at the level of the periodisation of post-war art. However, should “the complexly interacting set of anti-‘modernist’ artistic strategies” be understood exclusively as the abstract negation of a “restrictive and ultimately mystifying” Greenbergian modernism? Such a position suggests that Greenberg’s modernism was sufficiently hegemonic to bear generalisation as “modernism” proper and that subsequent developments in art were developed principally as a reaction to Greenberg. Yet while Greenberg’s theory was undoubtedly “critically ‘actual’” and culturally dominant it is not clear that it was totally hegemonic. This misses the significance of John Cage for the development of American artistic postmodernism, an influence that, emerging from music and musicology, was in no direct sense engaged with Greenbergian modernism—Cage was concerned to refute Schoenbergian serialism—yet nevertheless proved influential on the visual arts. Branden Joseph’s work is increasingly centred around a demonstration of the importance of Cage for the American art of the 1960s, see Branden Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

⁸⁷ Peter Osborne, “Art Beyond Aesthetics,” 663.

⁸⁸ “Jameson’s work” insists Anderson “has been of another scope – a majestic expansion of the postmodern across virtually the whole spectrum of the arts, and much of the discourse flanking them.” Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 57–58. It should be noted that this work was originally planned as an introduction to a volume of Jameson’s essays.

⁸⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4–5. For a critique of Jameson’s appropriation of Adorno’s theses on the Culture Industry see, Peter Osborne, “A Marxism for the Postmodern?” *New German Critique*, no. 56 (Spring-Summer, 1992): 171–192, especially 180–183.

⁹¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 158.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 158. My emphasis.

⁹⁵ Jack Burnham, “Steps in the Formulation of Real-Time Political Art,” in Hans Haacke, *Framing and Being Framed*, 127–141.

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Appendix

Victor Burgin, "Art-Society Systems," *Control* 4, (1968).

In approaching the problem of social control in art it would seem necessary to first establish, in principle, the particular province of art within the broad area of social control in general. To then determine the degree to which this province has been explored; and only finally to reform the model of art activity in favour of a greater relevance to, and efficiency in, the cause of control. The history of socially oriented art projects however is one of hasty, albeit enthusiastic, leaps into irrelevancy. The engagement of artists in such disparate activities as political propaganda and technological inquiries into "new" media is the result of focusing on the message content and message-carrying capabilities of the object. Failure is inherent in this attitude due to the reverse polarity of object-viewer exchange. Before considering any particular function of an "art object" it would be as well to examine the process by which such a category even exists.

Attempts to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions of aesthetic structure fail from an emphasis on the object rather than upon the perceiver. For example, the popular notion that "uselessness" is one of the defining attributes of a work of art is based in economical rather than aesthetic experience and has been well explained by Thorsten Veblen in terms of his "law of conspicuous waste" and "canon of pecuniary reputability." All artists, unless they are independently wealthy, suffer from the conflict between intellectual and economic demands, the latter having cast them in their sub-role as producers of objects for conspicuous consumption.

The implications of a redirection of attention, from object to perceiver, are extensive. It may now be said that an object becomes, or fails to become, a work of art in direct response to the inclination of the perceiver to assume an appreciative role. As Morse Peckham has put it "... art is not a category of perceptual field but of role-playing." From this it would seem that there is no objection to all of sensory experience being regarded as aesthetic. In principle there is not. (McLuhan's suggestion that the entire earth may become an art object in the newly appreciated environment of space). In practice, some experiences are preferred above others. This is probably because the role of art perceiver, like most other roles, is a learned one. It is here, in the planning of perceptual roles, that the artist may hope to exert some degree of control in the wider, extra-aesthetic, sense.

Flux in the aesthetic model of experience places demands on our perceptual behaviour. Change in any one aspect of our behaviour may affect any other of the behavioural traits with which it is organically integrated. Although, in language, we categorise behaviour for obvious referential purposes we have no direct experience of such tidy compartments. An analogy may be found in perception, where, for example, my appreciation of an unfamiliar piece of music may be conditioned by the relative comfort of the chair in which I am sitting and the state of my digestion. A complete catalogue of conditioning peripheral experience around my focus on the music would be very lengthy. Accepting this we cannot rationally justify the continued application of old modes of response in which, in art, our learned roles dictate that we discriminate between the components of our perceptual field in favour of a particular object. This latter being itself the obsolete relic of a defunct role, that of the "painter" or "sculptor."

The conventional model of art activity, that of the "avant-garde," is an unsatisfactory archetype of art activity at a high level. The comfort of the avant-garde lies in its self-

referential nature. Having closed the studio door behind him the painter excludes completely any considerations other than those of his canvas and his formalist dialectic with immediate art history. The illusion of “progress” is strongest and the embarrassment of a poor work is neutralised by free use of the word “experiment.” While wishing to avoid semantics it should be noted, if only in passing, that terminological transplants from one technical language into another can create havoc in the recipient area. The indiscriminate use of ill-considered scientific terms such as “progress” and “experiment” helps form the climate of irrelevance and falsity in which much critical opinion operates, and exposes the artist to accusations of scientism. Art, unlike science, does not investigate—it produces. These productions, at the highest levels, are made in response to the artist’s intuition of the future of society and not in response to the history of art. In forming his intuition and response the artist is involved in an exchange in which the important considerations are not of goals but of roles.

A new archetype of art activity which might be proposed involves reciprocity. Art affects behaviour. Behaviour within society at large in turn affects art in that it provides the artist with an intuition of the future. By then designating for this projected situation the artist helps his hypothesis become reality. Specifically, art challenges the predominant mode of perceptual behaviour. After the initial shock of disorientation, society accommodates itself to the new perceptual role and the new ideas are assimilated into the common environment. The relationship between art activity and the other activities in society then settles into stability, or in cybernetic terms the “system” undergoes a process of “entropy.” If art were a true “control” as defined by in cybernetics then this state of stability, once achieved, would be maintained indefinitely. Art would then be defined as a “homeostat;” that is, a control device for holding some variable, in this case the relationship between our perceptual behaviour and the raw stuff of our perceptual experience, within particular bounds. Of course, what actually happens once entropy has been effected in the art-society system is that art reacts to the feedback of accommodation by again provoking disorientation in popular perceptual behaviour. So, although the art-society system is a suitable subject for cybernetic investigation in that it is complex, indeterministic, and apparently self-regulatory, it would be wrong to say that art itself is a “control” in the cybernetic sense as it disrupts, rather than encourages, stability.

Art is neither a control in the cybernetic sense nor in the strongest literal sense as “the power of direction and command.” Art may be honestly said to exert social control only within the limitations of its being a structuring factor in the perceived environment, responsible for modifications in our perceptual role-playing, and a general influence as an activity amongst the community of activities which constitute society. How surprising then that even within these bounds art has not yet realised its full potential. This can only be due to its being fragmented.

The “limits” of individual art activities are related to experience in the way that “borders” of countries are related to natural terrain: distinctions of politics rather than of nature. A new art seems most likely to emerge from the integration of formerly discrete activities. The emerging artistic role is that of the designer of “activity clusters” formed for specific social and environmental situations. In ordering, as far as possible, the entirety of any given perceptual field, a complex of considerations is involved which far exceeds the present institutionalised practices of the artist. Institutional selectivity in art must make way for activity mosaics which will reflect the organic nature of perceptual experience. The discriminatory response to experience is appropriate if we are to avoid stepping on the cat but it is inappropriate to the development of a fuller sensibility. The artist who caters solely for that class of limited

response not only fails to appreciate the radical changes our whole way of life is undergoing but serves to retard our adaptation to these changes.

The prime function of art as a social control is to reactivate a sensory capacity in danger of atrophy. While we may agree that, through electronics, man has exteriorised and extended his nervous system, it is also a fact that his inherent, individual, sensory capability is in decline. In his transition from hunter to commuter man has allowed the machine to deputise for him to an ever-increasing degree. There is now a real danger that man will become a redundant component in the sensory circuit and so go into sensory decline, the final stage of which is defined as death.

Snow's "two cultures" are being replaced by a new dichotomy, that of man and robot, and in the ensuing confusion of roles we may face global psychic depression if we do not learn to render unto man what is his own. In a materially satiated and goal-less society the role-creating capacity of art might lead it into government!